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VOL. III No. 8

MAY 1950

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GOETHE AND THE IDEA OF SCIENTIFIC TRUTH

ERICH HELLER

1

'1794 — here at last was a year which I felt was going to compensate me by some diverting activities, some inspiration, some pleasure, for much that I had missed and suffered in the preceding years; and goodness knows I was badly in need of it.' This is how Goethe, in his *Annals*, begins his report on the year 1794. The modern reader can hardly fail to respond to Goethe's catalogue of grievances: the agitated restlessness of Europe; rumours of the approach of the enemy and of fussy aunts from more directly disturbed areas; the hasty selling of houses, the loss of friends through political partisanship; the clandestine distribution of French revolutionary manifestoes — 'they even found their way to me,' Goethe exclaims, 'and this through people whom one would never have suspected'; and above all the rule of Robespierre, 'the terrors of which had so deprived the world of any sense of joy that nobody felt like rejoicing even at the downfall of the tyrant'. And in addition, the distressing chaos, the obstreperous hollowness of the German literary scene! Goethe had returned from Italy with that vision of serenity, balance, equipoise with which he hoped he would conquer the national imagination which he had previously done so much to fill with unruly enthusiasm for suicidal lovers and rebellious knights with fists of iron. But, alas, while the Master recuperated in the sun of the South, the infection, the cold and the fever, were spread by his disciples in the unregenerate nordic climate. There was, for instance, that man Schiller, this 'vigorous but immature talent', as Goethe calls him, whose drama *Die Räuber* (The Robbers) 'disgusted me in the extreme', 'because he poured out over the country, in a gushing, irresistible torrent, precisely those moral and theatrical paradoxes which I had striven to eradicate from my own work'. And there were more such offenders: Heinse, for instance, whose *Ardinghella* was hateful to Goethe because its author used his art for the purpose of 'giving affected glamour to crass sensuality and abstruse modes of thought'. 'I was terrified', Goethe continues, 'by the hubbub they caused in the country, and by the applause with which the monstrous creations of their fancy were received by wild undergraduates and genteel ladies of the court alike.' 'Imagine the state I was in! I had hoped to cultivate and to communicate the purest ideas; and now I found myself squeezed tight between Ardinghella and Franz Moor.' 'It seemed as though all my

labours would be lost, all the things towards which, and all the ways in which I had developed myself would be abolished, and frustrated.' Goethe's intense dissatisfaction, his conviction of futility, culminates in the wish to abandon 'the contemplation of the arts and the practice of poetry altogether' — and we know that this was more than the fleeting whim of a disgruntled Olympian — 'for there appeared to be no chance whatsoever to compete with those wild productions of disorganized genius'.

Yet Goethe's desolation was not altogether caused by the unseemly behaviour of the world around him; there was an inner uncertainty too — an uncertainty which, in one form or another, was to provide the rest of his life with a deep dilemma, a source of inspiration as well as confusion, now raising his poetry and thought to those heights to which only the force of tension could carry them, now again trapping his genius in a tangle of insoluble contradictions. His doubts about the worth-whileness, indeed the possibility, of continuing his work as a poet will recur, and the blame will not always fall on the Robespierres of this world and other poets' successful *Robbers*. Now, in the year 1794, the dilemma took this form: 'The conflict which my scientific efforts had brought into my life was as yet by no means resolved; for my dealings with nature began to make claims on *all* my inner faculties.'

Thus, for the time being, Goethe was divided within himself, and out of harmony with nature; for his goddess Nature did not take the slightest notice of the afflictions of this year: 'The crops of the fields prospered magnificently, everything ripened a month too early, the fruit of the trees grew to perfection; apricots and peaches, melons and even chestnuts offered themselves in choice profusion, and also among the years of exquisite vintage 1794 has its place.'

The exquisite vintage is reassuring; Goethe's anger at Schiller's success in the theatre had nothing to do with sour grapes; moreover, it seems certain that this year in which nature was in so exuberant a mood, could not possibly end for Goethe on a note of unrelieved gloom. But it is a coincidence as neatly ironical as the sweetest apricots ripening in that summer of acrimonious discontent, that the light fell into Goethe's darkness through the arrival in his life of the author of the repulsive *Robbers*: Friedrich Schiller. This is what Goethe's diary says: 'In the midst of all these oppressions and conflicts the suddenly developing friendship with Schiller gave more to me than I could have dared to hope for; it ranks among the most precious gifts of fortune which my later years held in store for me.' The irony of fate is indeed profound, and deeper still than appears at first glance. For, as we have seen, Goethe's depression was partly due to his fear that his absorbing interest in scientific studies was feeding on his poetic resources; and now it is in a meeting of a society

of natural scientists that the friendship begins with the man to whom four years later he was to express his gratitude for having cured the paralysis of his poetic genius. 'And this happy occasion came about through my work concerning the Metamorphosis of Plants.' After that meeting — it took place in Jena and some scientist lectured — Goethe and Schiller, leaving the room, happened to reach the door at the same time. 'A conversation ensued; he, Schiller, appeared to have taken an interest in the lecture, and remarked — very intelligently, perspicaciously and to me most agreeably, that such a dissecting manner of dealing with nature could not possibly attract the layman. I replied that this manner may be uncanny even to the initiates, and that perhaps there was still the possibility of another method, one which would not tackle nature by merely dissecting and particularizing, but show her at work and alive, *manifesting herself in her wholeness in every single part of her being*. He said he would like to learn more about this though he did not conceal his doubts. He would not admit that all this emerged, as I insisted, *from experience itself*.'

In no time at all, it seems, their conversation had reached the crucial point. This is a dramatic climax in the history of German thought and letters: Goethe and Schiller, whose names will for ever mark the summit of literary achievement to which the genius of their nation, and probably of Europe, could rise in the second half of the eighteenth century, wandering through the streets of Jena, really in contact with each other for the first time. That it had not happened before — in spite of some previous chance meetings — was the outcome of strategy on the part of Goethe who was determined to avoid the man from whom he was separated 'by more than an earth diameter', and whom he had found guilty not only of theatrical excess, but also of philosophical wrongheadedness. In Schiller's essay *Anmut und Würde* (The Graceful and the Exalted) the Kantian abstractness had displeased him, but above all its antagonism to Nature in which Goethe, significantly enough, saw hostility towards himself; 'and if it was *not* aimed at me, so much the worse!' But there they go, engrossed in what seems merely a discussion about the growth of vegetables, but is, in fact, about the human mind in its search after truth.

They arrive at Schiller's house and, still talking, Goethe enters. This is Goethe's account of the occasion: 'I explained to him with great vivacity the Metamorphosis of Plants and, with a few characteristic strokes of the pen, conjured up before his eyes a symbolical plant. He listened, and looked at it all with great interest and intelligence; but when I had ended, he shook his head saying: This has nothing to do with *experience*, it is an *idea*. I raised my brows, somewhat annoyed. For he had put his finger on precisely the point which

separated us. His argument from *Anmut und Würde* came to my mind; the old anger began to stir, but I constrained myself and replied: Well, so much the better; it means that I have ideas without knowing it, and can even *see them with my eyes*. They carried on their discussion, with great polemical obstinacy on either side. Goethe reports that some of Schiller's sentences made him 'quite unhappy', for instance, the following: 'How can one ever equate experience with ideas? For an idea is characterized precisely by the fact that experience can never be fully congruous to it.' And Goethe, in his account of the discussion, reflects that 'if he takes for an idea what to me is experience, then there must, after all, prevail some mediation, some relationship between the two'.

At this point Goethe's account of his first conversation with Schiller breaks off. Owing to his new friendship, this year of troubles and tribulations ends, as he says, with a foretaste of spring. And, indeed, there will be flowers and colours; but also a theory of colours and much speculation about the objects of nature. In the period to come Goethe was to write, if not his most popular, yet his profoundest poetry. The danger of inspiration drying up in later years, the fate of Wordsworth, is averted. The dilemma of which we have heard appears to be solved; there will be poetry *and* science; a science, it is true, radically at odds with the scientific temper of the age; a science doubtful and often unambiguously wrong in its results, but of immense importance for our understanding of the intellectual and spiritual situation of the age, and of the nature of poetic and scientific truth. Goethe's science has contributed nothing substantial to the scientific progress between his time and ours, and nothing whatsoever to the advancement of techniques for the mastery and exploitation of nature; but he has, by his opposition to contemporary science, laid bare in his time, with remarkable precision, the very roots of that crisis and revolution in scientific method in which the twentieth-century scientist finds himself involved. In the history of science from Newton to Einstein, Goethe, the scientist, plays a Cinderella part, showing up the success and splendour of his rich relations, but also the potential *hubris* inherent in their pursuits. There may come a day when this Cinderella story will find the conclusion proper for such tales — but perhaps not before the empires of the day have brought ruin upon themselves by their own atomic pride, and not before the new ecclesia of technology has had its consummate triumph by bringing to their explosive fusion the iciest mathematical abstractions and the hot appetite for power.

We had left the first disputation between Goethe and Schiller where Goethe himself chose to leave it. Perhaps it was a wise break, for the next step would lead still deeper into the region of metaphysics, an area which is strictly out of bounds for the brave soldiers of the

positivist age, and full of the unspeakable dreads and bogies which inhabit the nursery-tales told to the children of science. But it is, at the same time, the very workshop where the invisible mould is cast and re-cast, from which all our organized intellectual activities take their shape. It may be rewarding to ignore the warnings and enter it for a while. First, however, it is advisable to look at that symbolical plant which Goethe had sketched out for Schiller, and which, in spite of Goethe's 'characteristic strokes of the pen', remained an 'idea' for that disciple of Immanuel Kant, even in the face of Goethe's assurance that he could see it with his eyes.

2

Palermo, April 17th, 1787 — seven years before Goethe's first meeting with Schiller. This is what the chronicle of the *Italian Journey* says under that date:

'It is a real disaster if a man is tempted by a host of conflicting demons. This morning I went to the Public Gardens, calmly and firmly determined to carry on with my poetic designs; yet in no time another ghost which had secretly pursued me all these days, had caught hold of me. The many plants which elsewhere I used to see only in pots, and mostly under glass, grow here cheerfully under the open sky, and, living as they are really meant to live, reveal themselves to us with greater clarity. Confronted with so many new shapes, I was once more overcome by my old whimsical fascination: might I not discover among this crowd the *Urpflanze* (that original plant from which all others are derived)? After all, it must exist; how could I otherwise know that this shape *and* that are both plants if they were not all organized according to one principle?' And even then the cry of the distracted poet: 'My poetic intention had come to nothing . . . Why are we modern people so open to distraction, why so easily provoked into pursuits which are bound to lead nowhere?' Yet this particular diversion did seem to lead somewhere. Exactly a month later, on May 17th, 1787, he wrote from Naples to Frau von Stein: 'And then I must confide to you that I am very close to discovering the secret of the creation and organization of plants. Under this sky one is able to make the most beautiful observations. The crucial point from which everything else must needs spring, I have already established beyond doubt; the rest too I can see in outline; only a few points have still to be ascertained. The *Urpflanze* is to be the strangest creature in the world; Nature herself shall be jealous of it. After this model it will be possible to *invent* plants *ad infinitum*, which will all be consistent, that is, they *could* exist even if they have no actual existence; they would not be mere picturesque or poetic shadows or dreams, but would possess an *inner truth and necessity*. *And the same law will be applicable to everything alive.*'

These enthusiastic outbursts seem to bode ill for the scientific work that was to be based on the discovery made in Italy. Yet, when three years later, in 1790, Goethe's *Essay on the Metamorphosis of Plants* appeared, it was as quiet in tone, as systematic in approach, as painstaking in minute observation, as any classical scientific composition. Its central idea is that all the single parts which constitute a plant are derived from one original formation, and that all varieties of plants, beginning with those of the simplest organization and ascending to the most complex structures, are the result of a gradual metamorphosis or transformation, brought about by the *responsiveness* of the organism to the restrictions put upon it, or the advantages offered to it by the surrounding world, the soil, the weather, the insects. This responsiveness, however, is not a mere giving-in to external influences, it is rather like a creative conversation between within and without, a kind of dialectical education through which the individual form becomes in actuality what from the very beginning it had been potentially. For what is within and what is without are for Goethe mere poles of one and the same thing, producing a tension — the tension of *polarity* — through which the particular organism undergoes what Goethe calls *Steigerung*, a gradual intensification and purification of its being:

Natur hat weder Kern
Noch Schale,
Alles ist sie mit einem male.

Nature knows neither Within nor Without; she is everything at once.

Classifying the various types of metamorphosis as progressive, retrogressive and arbitrary, he starts with investigations into the manifold forms of the cotyledon, the seed-leaf of plants, and seeks to establish its development from shapelessness to shape, from something that looks, as it were, like nothing, to something that distinctly looks like a leaf; he observes a gradual increase of this embryonic leaf in the direction of 'leafishness', an ever clearer articulation, in which the slow emergence of greenness plays its part, until it becomes the full-grown leaf of the plant. It is this very leaf which in its turn is modified and diversified into sepal, petal, pistil and stamen; he shows us how, for instance in the carnation, sepals merge with petals, and how they can be met, in an effort to produce a full corolla, by an identical transformation of filament, anther and stigma. 'Everything is leaf', is Goethe's final finding, but he is perfectly aware of the *verbal* embarrassments and misunderstandings that such a theory must needs produce; he himself anticipated the objections which Helmholtz was later to raise to this monistic simplification, showing the tautological character of Goethe's theory. Any definition of that unique vegetable organ, Goethe's 'leaf',

Helmholtz says, which is to comprehend all other aspects of the plant, would have to end up by stating that it is 'a lateral appendix of the plant axle' — in fact, the same as the flower itself. 'And in order to see that no Goethe was needed.'

Even if one grants that Goethe's theory is untenable, Helmholtz's criticism makes no sense either, but only shows how unbridgeable is the gulf between Goethe's vision, and what can be comprehended through the mental operations of modern science. The two never meet, and polemic becomes an intellectual fidgeting-about in strictly separated and closed compartments. It is obvious that, if Goethe says 'leaf', he does not mean a 'lateral appendix of the plant axle'; he means, or rather sees before his eyes, what is the Platonic idea of a plant in its simplest, and, in its perfect simplicity, most perfect form. Goethe himself felt over and over again with naive dismay and painful poignancy how ill-served *his* science was by the established methods of scientific exposition. His inquisitive gaze was focused on a sphere of experience which defies that logical analysis proper to the sphere of modern science, and whose language is fundamentally untranslatable into the logically respectable medium of polite abstractions. This will be still more obvious, when we come to Goethe's campaigns in physics, and to his Thirty Years War against Newton.

For the time being we can see Goethe desperately trying to straighten out the vicious circle of tautologies in which, very much later, Helmholtz showed the 'scientific fallacy' of his omnipresent leaf to move. In one of the concluding paragraphs of his *Metamorphosis of Plants* Goethe says: 'It is evident that we would need a specific word with which to denote that organism which is capable of transforming itself into such a variety of shapes, and against which we could set up all the phenomena into which it unfolds. For we can say just as well that a stamen is a contracted petal, as we can say of the petal that it is a stamen in the state of expansion ...' And among his posthumous notes there was found the following jotting: 'Leaf as a definite organism in the empirical sense, as a determinable organism in a higher sense.' Add to this what he says about the *Urpflanze* in the *History of my Botanical Studies*, written during the last years of his life: 'As all these manifold forms of plants can be subsumed under one idea, it became increasingly clear to me that my intuition could be aided by a yet higher means — a possibility which hovered before my mind's eye in the concrete shape of an ideal *Urpflanze*. I followed up all the changing forms as they appeared to me, and at last, at the end of my journey, in Sicily, the original identity of all parts of the plant stood revealed before me' — and Goethe's struggle to convey in scientific terms the intuitive nature of his vision emerges in all its pathetic beauty.

His difficulty is, in reverse, the same as that which obstructs the way of the modern physicist when he sets out to translate the findings of his science into the language of concrete images; then we are in no time in a Walt Disney world of colourful absurdities, watching the voids of infinitely finite space heaving and waving with nothing to heave and wave with, but providing in this odd manner the ideal medium for insubstantial substance to travel through with unimpeded speed; or we applaud the surprisingly clever devices by which our universe expands, where nobody would have expected anything to expand into; or we are entertained by the merry-go-rounds of tiny nonentities, performing from time to time the most unpredictable antics, for no obvious reason but just to exercise their own free will.

If one takes into account the underlying incongruity between Goethe's vision and the medium in which modern science operates, and, resulting from it, Goethe's own indecision as to the nature of the *Urpflanze*, now treated as though it were the pragmatalist ancestor of all plants, and now again like their Platonic idea, then it is still more surprising to see how fruitful Goethe's biology was. He is one of the first to be fully conscious of the morphological problem in biological studies. It is the unsolved problem and the inspiration of all theories of evolution, concerned, as it is, with the living *form*, its genesis and transformation. 'To recognize living forms *as such*, to see in context their visible and tangible parts, to perceive them as manifestations of *something within*, and thus to master them, to a certain extent, in their *wholeness* through a concrete vision (*Anschauung*)', this is how he introduces the purpose of his morphological studies. Their pursuit, clearly, presupposes more than an analysis of sensory preceptions. Goethe's morphology, with its insistence on the relevance of '*something within*', was incommensurable with the scientific methods of his age; and Goethe knew it. 'How few', he exclaims, 'draw their inspiration from what is visible to the mind alone!' 'He who concentrates his powers of understanding entirely on the particular and on those exact observations which can be analysed, tends to regard as a mere nuisance everything that, emerging from an idea, leads back to an idea.' His biological interest is centred in that *inner* principle which determines the organization of living forms. Indeed, he is aware, as we have seen, of the perpetually modifying forces working from without, but remains fascinated by what he calls '*the self-revealed mystery*' (*das offene Geheimnis*) which maintains the fundamental unity of the created shape, its idea, through all its variations and modifications.

Thus Goethe's biology has its somewhat puzzling place in as close a neighbourhood to Plato and Aristotle on the one hand, and to Darwin on the other — as through his literary output he divides the

camps of critics by his mystifying kinship to both Homer and Stendhal. Hold beside one another the two following biological statements of his: 'What ultimately determines the living form, is its innermost nucleus; the external elements merely modify its appearances' and, at the other end of the scale, 'The more highly organized beings advance a few evolutionary stages, leaving behind their fellow-creatures', and you see his mind most busily occupied in a splendidly equipped half-way house of which, however, you cannot be quite sure whether it looks like an Academy of ancient Greece or like the Cavendish Laboratory at Cambridge. It would be unwise to see the first utterance, with its emphasis on the decisive power of the innermost nucleus of an organism, as an ingenious anticipation of genes and chromosomes; it is, in fact, far nearer to Aristotle's *entelechy* than to modern genetics. And concerning the second quotation with its Darwinian ring (and it is only one out of many that could be quoted), the interpreters of Goethe's science are by no means united; those who see in Goethe's works nothing but the second coming of the spirit of antiquity, suggest that he would have rejected *in toto* Darwin's theory; others for whom Goethe is the first-born of modernity claim him as one of the direct ancestors of the *Origin of Species*. It is more likely that Darwin's work would have attracted as well as repelled Goethe; attracted, because it supplied powerful evidence for Goethe's fondest belief in the fundamental oneness of all that lives, and above all in the uniformity prevailing within each type of living creature. It was with rhapsodic enthusiasm that in 1784 he had reported to Herder his first scientific triumph: the discovery of the *os intermaxillare* (the intermaxillary bone) in the human skull which finally showed the complete structural identity of all vertebrates, including human beings. The assumed absence in the human skeleton of this peculiar bone of contention had, in a generation of scientists afflicted by an unbelievable feebleness of spiritual convictions, been the last shred of proof that they had been created by God according to a very special anatomical design.

And yet, Goethe would also have been repelled by Darwin's theory. He would have seen in it yet another, and very decisive, step along that road which, he believed, would lead to spiritual perdition. No, Goethe was not afraid of the first chapter of Genesis being discredited as a set book by the Honours school of geology, biology and anthropology; but he was terrified that experimental science in alliance with a mechanistic philosophy of nature, so successful in posing and answering questions about the 'How' of things, so prolific in establishing expected and unexpected relationships between this, that or the other, might finally abolish in the world all creative interest in what this, that or the other *are* and *mean*. For Darwin's

theory was bound to feed the body of superstitious beliefs that had grown rampant ever since medieval scholasticism suffered its final defeat at the hands of Francis Bacon.

Willingly or unwillingly, Darwin had to give still greater force to that system of unsystematized, inarticulate metaphysical fallacies which one might term the Creed of the Ontological Invalidity; both in the sense that it dismisses *a priori* as invalid all ontological assertions, i.e. assertions about the nature and meaning of Being (as different from the laws governing the processes, connections and interconnections of the phenomenal world, of all that becomes, develops, evolves), as well as in the sense that it has made an incurable invalid of that faculty of the human intelligence which, grasping their relevance, is capable of positively responding to questions asked about *what* the world is. To such questions the modern intelligence is prone to respond with that mixture of shame, embarrassment, revulsion and arrogance which is the characteristic reaction of impotence to unfortunately unmanageable demands. This invalid has been left ever since in the nursing care of unhappy poets, dreamers or religious eccentrics if he was not satisfied with the treatment he received as an outpatient of the Church. Once man's ability to respond creatively to the ontological mystery had been stunted into something that produces merely an irritated state of mystification, he was left to the spiritual destructiveness of that battle raging within himself: between the conviction of being nothing in the vastness of the universe, and the natural urge which, prompted by the ungrace of self-assertion, persuades him of his all-importance. To be nothing and yet everything — this seeming paradox is the pride and the humility of the creature before a God of infinite power and infinite love; but it is the spiritual death suffered by man in the incessant struggle between arrogance and humiliation, in his exposure to the mighty lovelessness of a chance constellation of energy. It is this gloomy story that is told by modern literature from Nietzsche to Kafka, from Proust to Sartre, from Yeats to T. S. Eliot, from Dostoevsky — to his being banned by a government which has decreed that the ontological mystery is to be abolished, sabotaging, as it does, the campaign for atomic equality.

This state of spiritual affairs accounts for Goethe's strange position in the history of modern science. He had appointed himself a kind of emissary of Being in a territory of the human mind which had given itself up to the alluring mechanics of becoming, progressing, evolving and revolving. He too realized — and more profoundly than the world around him — that growth, transformation, metamorphosis, was the element of life. What I hold to be his greatest poem, *Selige Sehnsucht*, ends with the verse:

Und solang du das nicht hast,
Dieses: Stirb und Werde!
Bist du nur ein trüber Gast
Auf der dunklen Erde

meaning that we remain but dim shadows on a dark planet as long as we have not experienced within ourselves, not consummated through our being, many a death and many a resurrection. 'Die and rise again!' But this sequence of dying and becoming, of systole and diastole, of breathing in and breathing out, this polarity of life within man and outside him, is for Goethe not the rhythm of a motion prompted by external, and spiritually neutral forces, directed towards an unknown destination in an as yet empty future, but is held together at every moving point and at every fleeting moment by a centre of stillness:

Und alles Drängen, alles Ringen
Ist ewige Ruh in Gott dem Herrn.

(And all this struggle, whirl and stir
Is infinite peace in God.)

That man is related to the animal world (and to all that is alive) Goethe knew before Darwin; the theory that he has descended (if anything, *ascended*, Goethe would have said) from some sort of ape-like creature, would have roused in him a technical interest, the same that he took in the colours with which the painter painted, and the material in which the sculptor hewed. But beyond that he would, I think, have regarded it as the kind of knowledge not worth having. If it were not preposterous to add to the unmanageable quantity of things that Goethe has said, a few guesses about what he might have said, it would be very tempting to let one's imagination play on the possible responses which Darwin would have evoked in Goethe. It might bring out very clearly one of the most important aspects of Goethe's idea of truth. And as I have already been unguarded enough to say that he would have dismissed a great deal of the knowledge supplied by Darwin, not as incorrect, but as worthless, let me dwell a little on this apparently outrageous paradox. Paradox or not, there *is* a sense in which Darwin's theory, though it be perfectly correct, may yet be blatantly *untrue*. It is a very simple mystery which is behind this wild assertion, shocking to common sense only because common sense in each epoch consists in an astonishingly complex agglomeration of highly sophisticated half-truths. One such half-truth in which our common sense indulges (and much in our higher education is based on it, including its 'crisis') is the doctrine that any kind of knowledge, as long as it supplies us with correctly ascertained facts, is worth teaching and

learning, and that the more such correct facts we accumulate, the nearer we come to Truth. We have become so democratic in our habits of thought that we are convinced that Truth is determined through a plebiscite of facts.

To all this Goethe's idea of Truth, including, to his own bewilderment and ours, 'scientific' truth, is in radical opposition. Nobody familiar with Goethe's writings can possibly overlook the deep-rooted antagonism of his genius to the mental habits predominant in his age; but neither must one ignore his occasional strains, embarrassments and confusions, caused by the simultaneous desire to realize to the full his citizenship in the contemporary world. Very often in Goethe's works — with the exception of his lyrical poetry — there comes a point where the innate tendency of his genius and his mundane wisdom get into each other's way, producing artistic discords. Take, for instance, his *Tasso*: here the emotional defeat of the poet is meant to carry the message that even poetical souls should heed the ways of the world; yet this defeat gives birth to such exquisite poetry, and the executive organs of the victorious world appear so unconvincing, and at times so petty and trivial, that instead of being spontaneously persuaded by the instruction of wisdom, one longs to have a soul as sensitive, as alive and as innocently uncompromising as Tasso's. To be Tasso, the poet, and Antonio, the worldling, was Goethe's consciously accepted programme. But how is the poet to remain in the world if the world becomes more unpoetic every day? How is one to keep spiritual communion with the Earth Spirit, and at the same time outphysic Newton? Only if Tasso was as much prepared to learn his lesson from Antonio, as the Newtonians in their turn were prepared to listen to the poet. Undoubtedly, the world is made of harder stuff than the poetic imagination, and is altogether too dark a place to suit to perfection a soul asking from beginning to end, and with its very last words, for 'more light'; therefore leave the light alone in its unsynthetic whiteness, and the colours, the offspring of light and darkness.

Behind Goethe's scientific experiments and results, presented in a detached, sober and even laboriously pedantic fashion, one can discern clearly the strategic plan of a man engaged in a campaign for restoring the balance of power between analytical reason and creative imagination. 'All objects have an ideal character', he once wrote to Schiller, 'not merely within an actual work of art, but also as potential subjects for a work of art'. The anxiety that the world, in the course of its increasing analytical disruption, may approach the point where it would become poetically useless and a barren place for the human affections to dwell in, informs Goethe's scientific motives and makes him persist in an activity which, for long periods,

to the detriment of his poetic creativeness and to his own dismay, 'absorbs all my inner faculties'. William Blake, unknown to Goethe, but his brother in arms against Newton, found things easier. He was a medieval peasant compared with Goethe, who had so big a share in mundane sophistication. For Blake the inventor of modern physics was simply party to a conspiracy of spiritual sin, a mythological ambassador, the second person in the Trinity of Evil, flanked by Bacon and Locke. But then, Blake saw angels in pear-trees, Goethe only 'ideas'. For him it could not be enough to say that modern physics was wicked; it had to be proven wrong by experimental methods. Yet somewhere, behind all the scientific paraphernalia, he too denounces sin where he appears to expose, by sinning himself in a slightly modified fashion, the faultiness of a scientific theory.

But there is — and not only for Goethe — a dimension of experience where, on the other side of tricky philosophical speculation and rational argumentation, it becomes self-evident that what is not right, cannot be true. It is the sphere of knowledge in which Truth, Goodness and Beauty are one, the moment of understanding what the indefinable good life is. Then there is no doubt that a man, given up to fascinations which exercise only those of his faculties which have the least bearing on what he is as a person, his affections, his passions, his beliefs, his imagination — in fact, on the truth in which and by which he is a person — is merely digging away in the gulf between him and the good life. For Goethe all knowledge which cannot be assimilated in a concord of all the human faculties of understanding, heightening and cleansing them all in their mutual interplay, man's 'passion and reason, his imagination and his critical intelligence', as he puts it; all knowledge which will only cause a man 'to fret away his days in the narrowest and most joyless limitation', is fundamentally worthless and undeserving of the name of truth. Can man, in this sense, assimilate, 'realize', his descent from the apes? Does he know better — not how he came to be, but what he is? Has the mathematical waving of a nondescript medium anything to do with the light and colour as man experiences them and as they affect him? These simple-minded questions carry the flavour of that simple mystery which I have said was at the bottom of Goethe's conviction that there was neither grace nor truth in that type of science which he took so much unrewarded trouble to oppose.

3

Goethe's *Theory of Colours* which appeared in 1810 and of which he said one year before his death that it was as old as the world, is based — as all his scientific theories — on what he calls an *Urphänomen*, an idea so fundamental to the *quality* of a group of phenomena

that the human mind is ill-advised to penetrate beyond it. It is that idea which, manifesting itself through the phenomena themselves, Goethe can, as he said to Schiller, see 'with his own eyes'. One step further, and we have lost sight of the world in which man *actually* lives, of everything that matters to him as a human being, of the sights, sounds, touches, smells, tastes, loves and hatreds — finding ourselves instead in an unrealizable infinity of potential abstractions. Thus the *Urphänomen* marks for Goethe the point where the observer is still in contact with what he observes, and beyond which the *real* relationship between a human being and an object of nature ceases, with the object no longer being what it is and the human mind establishing itself as a subjective tyrant: the physicist becomes the task-master of nature, 'collects experiences, hammers and screws them together through artificial experiments . . .', says Goethe, 'yet permit us to meet with a sceptical smile the daring assertion that this is still nature; has an architect ever pretended that his palaces are mountain-ranges and forests?'

The *Urphänomen* underlying Goethe's *Theory of Colours* is the polarity between light and darkness. Light for him is the bright, white radiance of a sunny day, not that ray distilled by Newton, forced through the tiniest holes and tortured by complicated mechanisms. That white light should be a concoction of various colours is to Goethe 'a manifest absurdity'. It is not the colour which produces the white light, but the white light which produces the colours. 'Colours are the actions and sufferings of light', he says, the result of its meeting with darkness. Thus darkness is not merely defined as the absence of light, it is a creative force in its own right. Darkness interferes with light through all the shades of opaqueness provided by various media. When Goethe, having studied for the first time, and misunderstood, Newton, looked through a prism he was taken aback by the fact that the white wall still appeared white. Colours appeared only where the whiteness of the wall came to an end at the frontier of something darker; the window-frame. Thus a demarcation line is necessary for colours to emerge, the frontier between light and darkness. There are only two fundamental colours: yellow and blue, yellow emerging at the point where light has to yield some of its territory to darkness, and blue where light makes its first tentative inroad into blackness. By intensification and mixing one obtains all the other colours; allow more and more darkness to intrude into yellow and you get orange and red, and give light a better chance in its combat with black, and violet and a bluish red appear. Mix the two elemental colours, yellow and blue, and you have green. Thus Goethe arrives at his colour-cycle where yellow and blue, red and violet, green and what he calls purple, face one another; they are complementary colours.

It is all very delightful and very obvious: you need only look at the sun, setting behind the vapours of the evening; it turns yellow, orange, red as the opaqueness of the atmosphere increases; look at the smoke rising from the chimney of your neighbour's house; now it is a light bluish-grey colour, and now again almost black, according to the density of the opaque particles which it carries.

Though it is delightful and obvious (or perhaps, because?), it is yet quite useless to the mathematical physicist. Less useless were Goethe's theories to the physiologist; for he was the first to treat seriously of the *active* role which the eye assumes in the creation of light- and colour-effects. The opening section of his work is devoted to what he calls 'physiological colours', as distinct from physical and chemical colours, and it is this section which inspired Johannes Müller, the founder of the theory of specific sense-energies. Through him Goethe, ignored by the physicist, still plays his part in modern physiopsychology (and, of course, in aesthetics, an aspect of the problem of colours to which the last section of Goethe's work is devoted and which abounds, as one would expect, with the most penetrating observations about the emotional value of colour and colour-compositions — very similar in approach and results to the theorizing on the subject by Leonardo da Vinci whose writings on colour seem to have been unknown to Goethe).

'The eye', Goethe says (in phrases which are the happiest expression of the style of his thought), 'is created through light for light so that the inner light should meet the light from without. Here we remember the ancient Ionian school which, with so much emphasis, repeated again and again that knowledge is a responding of equal to equal; we also think of the words of the ancient mystic [he means Plotinus' *Neque vero oculus unquam videret solem nisi factus solaris esset*] which we would like to express in German verse as follows:

Wär nicht das Auge sonnenhaft,
Wie könnten wir das Licht erblicken?
Lebt' nicht in uns des Gottes eigne Kraft,
Wie könnt uns Göttliches entzücken?

[If the eye were not sun-like, how could we ever see light? And if God's own power did not also dwell within us, How could we delight in things divine?]

'Nobody will deny the immediate kinship between light and eye; but it may be difficult to think of both as being one and the same. Perhaps this will become more comprehensible if we say that in the eye there dwells a dormant light which comes to life at the least provocation from within or without. Even in complete darkness our imagination can have for the asking the most brightly illumined

images. In our dreams we see things as distinctly as in broad daylight. When we are awake we respond to the slightest change of light, and even a purely mechanical irritation draws light and colour from our eyes.'

It may have become clear by now that Goethe's physics, though anti-Newtonian in motivation, is, in fact, not anti-mathematical, but, as it were, a-mathematical, which is as much as to say that it is not physics at all — at least, not in the now accepted sense of the word. Newton's and Goethe's theories never meet, except at some points of confusion on the part of Goethe. I have attempted to say something about the nature and motive of Goethe's opposition, his method and approach. Yet there is more to it, and it is this 'more' which is at the very centre of Goethe's idea of truth of which we have already seen some facets. In order to approach that centre more closely, we have to risk that long postponed plunge into metaphysics which loomed darkly before us when we left Goethe and Schiller debating the question whether the *Urpflanze* was an 'idea' or something 'real'.

In the preface to Goethe's *Theory of Colours* there is a passage which, to my knowledge, has never yet caught the eye of any critical student of Goethe. To me it seems a key-phrase: 'It is the strangest claim in the world — raised sometimes, but never lived up to even by those who raise it — that one should present experiences without any theoretical link between them, and leave it to the reader, or the pupil, to form his own convictions. But the mere looking at a thing is of no use whatsoever. Looking at a thing gradually merges into contemplation, contemplation into thinking, thinking is establishing connections, and thus it is possible to say that every attentive glance which we cast on the world, is an act of theorizing. This, however, ought to be done with consciousness, self-criticism, freedom, and, to use a daring word, with *irony* — yes, all these faculties are necessary if abstraction, which we dread, is to be rendered innocuous, and the result which we hope for, to emerge with as much liveliness as possible.'

Goethe, with all his insistence on objectivity, concreteness of thought (*Gegenständlichkeit*), with his apparent un-Kantian confusion — so exasperating to Schiller — of transcendence and immanence, idea and experience, with his repeated protestations that 'philosophy is not my métier', in this passage gives himself away as a profound philosopher. 'Theorizing' is inherent in all human experience, because experience is, as he says elsewhere, 'only half the experience', the other half being the ordering activity of the mind. And the previously quoted sentence from a letter of his to Schiller, in which he spoke of 'the ideal character' that things not merely acquire through a work of art, but possess as potential

subjects of the artist, continues: 'By looking upon them in their possible relation to art, the human mind has instantly transformed them!'

Now Goethe had no distinct historical interests, it is even possible to say that he had no sense of history, regarding, as he did, all historiography with the utmost suspicion. But his *History of the Theory of Colours* may well be the first history of scientific method — a subject so much clamoured for in our day. It is, though the student of Goethe is apt to avoid it carefully, in parts an astonishingly interesting book. Read with one's attention focused on certain problems, it exposes the naive fallacy of the still predominant absolute belief in the pragmatic test. One knows, of course, how many scientific theories have, for very long periods of time, stood the test of experience until they had to be discarded owing to man's decision, not merely to make other experiments, but *to have different experiences*; one also knows how often, after having lain for whole epochs in the cosmic dustbin of untruth, a theory, in one form or another, has been fetched back in triumph. For more unsophisticated aesthetic demands the game of musical chairs in which, ever since Newton and Huygens, the corpuscles and waves of light have found themselves involved — until, by a blatant breach of the rules of the game, they simply sat down together on one seat — may be as entertaining as the out-dated, but certainly loftier delight of musical spheres. And has not Einstein, on behalf of the guilty guild of physicists, repaired a great deal of the damage caused in Rome by Galileo, when he proved that the whole quarrel had been merely the regrettable outcome of a scientific misunderstanding?

But it is not only this gay exuberant dance of scientific hypotheses which is revealed by Goethe's history of science. For every scientific theory is merely the surface rationalization of a metaphysical substratum of beliefs, conscious or unconscious, about the nature of the world. And it is these beliefs too, these models of reality constructed in human minds and souls, which live and prosper for vast stretches of history in perfect pragmatic integrity, and, to a remarkable extent, *create*, not find and accept, the shape of the external world. The totems and taboos of savages, the pyramids of Egypt, the acropolis of Athens, the cathedral of Chartres pragmatically prove as much, or as little, of the ultimate nature of reality as any modern scientific experiment. It is indeed amazing how malleable the world is and how easily it models and remodels itself according to the inner vision of man, how readily it responds to his 'Theorizing'! Thus the most important intellectual advice which an educator can give to his pupils, may easily be: Be careful how you interpret the world; it *is* like that. One usually assumes that the beliefs or unbeliefs of modern man originate in the scientific discoveries made in the

seventeenth century; it is equally correct, and perhaps more so, to say that the scientific discoveries of the seventeenth century could not have been made without the vision of reality, held by man, having previously undergone a radical change. There is a direct line linking the minds of the Reformers of the sixteenth century, invoking the authority of the Bible against the tradition of the Church, to the mind of Francis Bacon claiming the authority of nature against the tenets of scholastic philosophy; from Luther's biblical pragmatism to Bacon's natural pragmatism, from Rome being discredited as the focus of Christendom to the earth being dislodged from its central position in the universe; and, to leap a few centuries, from Nietzsche's relativization of all spiritual values to the Theory of Relativity, and from the Symbolist and Surrealist atomization of artistic imagery to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle.

Goethe's *History of the Theory of Colours* gives us a few chapters of this Odyssey of the human mind. 'The history of the world must be rewritten from time to time,' he says, 'not because many events of the past are being rediscovered, but because new vistas are opening up, new ways of looking at things, which show the past in a different light'. Of Bacon he says: 'In the second half of the sixteenth century the emancipation of the individual progresses. Everyone comfortably enjoys what has been gained, and rushes through the liberated spaces; the disinclination to acknowledge authority becomes more and more marked, and as one has protested in religion, so one will protest, at all costs, in science, and at last Bacon of Verulam can dare to wipe out, as if with a sponge, everything that had been inscribed upon the tables of mankind.' And in one of his diary jottings he anticipates with remarkable precision what in our century Whitehead has called the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness, the fatal illusion of an age which accepts the sketch of the model of reality that it has drawn itself, its own theoretical presuppositions, as the concrete nature of reality. Goethe says: 'Have thought about fiction and science. The disaster they cause comes from the need of reflective reason which creates, for its own use, a sort of image, but will afterwards set it up as true and concrete.'

But all this profound insight into the follies and fallacies of man thinking his way through the ages, does not with Goethe, as it so easily could, lead to any historical relativization of the idea of truth. What saves him is what would save the authentically great artist and what would be shatteringly naive on any other level but his: the faith in the intuitive, indeed visionary faculty of his genius. Of course, this faith never becomes pompously articulate. When Goethe speaks of it, he speaks with that irony which with him is a prerequisite of intellectual honesty — perhaps it hardly ever becomes

conscious. But there is one occasion where, again with some irony, he seems to reach a final, and for him indeed very satisfactory conclusion to that argument with Schiller, and through Schiller with Kant, which I quoted at the beginning. That Kant had absolutely denied to human intelligence the possibility of 'seeing ideas', of reaching the absolute lucidity of Plato's ἐπιστήμη, that the human understanding should be for ever imprisoned within the confines of that unhappy hunting ground where the physical scientist is after his phenomenal game, had been a secret vexation for Goethe ever since he came into contact with that philosophy which had satisfied the philosophical need of the modern mind, as Thomas of Aquinas satisfied that of the Middle Ages.

On the occasion of which I am speaking, he had once more struggled with Kant and underlined the following sentence in which the philosopher deals with the rational possibility of conceiving of a divine mind: 'We are able to think of an understanding which, not being discursive as ours, but intuitive, starts with a universal vision and descends from there to the particular, that is, from the One to the Many.' And Goethe notes: 'I suppose the author hints here at the reason of God, yet if it is possible for us (as Kant admits) to lift ourselves up to a higher region through the *moral* law within us, through faith, virtue and immortality, and thus to approach the Absolute Being, then, perhaps, it may be the same in the intellectual sphere and we may, by our incessant contemplation of incessantly creative Nature, become worthy of some intellectual participation in her creativeness. If, to begin with, I strove, unconsciously and merely prompted by an inner motive, to reach the *Urpheänomen* and the secret of the type, and if I even succeeded in erecting on this basis a theory in accordance with Nature, then nothing shall prevent me from braving now what the old man of Königsberg himself calls the *Adventure of Reason*.'

And so he braves it. To the end of his life he will fail, or refuse, to grasp completely what Schiller and Kant were about. The unfathomable before which he too resigns himself, is yet revealed to him in the world of phenomena; not the Absolute itself, but the mirror reflection of its majestic remoteness: 'Im farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben.' Absolute Truth and the Goethean Scientific Truth are not different in kind, merely in degrees of, as it were, absoluteness. Therefore by scientific truth Goethe never means the results, correct or incorrect, produced by what he denounces, implicitly and explicitly, as a strange aberration of the human mind, a rather perverse marriage between the crudest empiricism and the most abstruse mathematical abstractness. His science, like his poetry, is founded on the conviction — self-evident to him — that man, if only he exercises *all* his faculties of understanding, is, as he

says, adequately equipped to know what he is meant to know about life without having to put 'nature on the rack'; for there, he says, she remains silent. Truth is what man is meant to know — this is the centre of Goethe's intellectual existence. It is rather perturbing for the modern intelligence; where are the measures, it will ask, by which we can assess what is 'meant'? Indeed, they cannot be defined, they emerge from Goethe's vision of the goodness of life and the fittingness of all its parts if only they are allowed to grow organically. Truth is 'a revelation', he says, 'emerging at the point where the inner world of man meets external reality... It is a synthesis of world and mind, yielding the happiest assurance of the eternal harmony of existence'; and again, 'there resides, in the objective world, an unknown law which corresponds to the unknown law within subjective experience', and therefore — though he used them himself — 'when it comes to it, microscopes and telescopes merely confuse the pure human vision'. Unknown and yet revealed — this is the nature of truth which Goethe seeks to make more and more his own by exercising his intuition, imagination and discursive intelligence, with freedom and irony.

It is only on those very few occasions, when he seems to be persuaded that Kant is right after all and that Schiller may have justly denied him the privilege of direct intercourse with the ideas, that he seems to be prepared to leave science alone and resign himself to his poetry. This he expresses in a little meditation (*Bedenken und Ergebung* — Reflection and Resignation) in which he gives a most exact précis of Kant's philosophy, stating in conclusion that 'understanding cannot think together what the senses convey to it in separation, and so the conflict between perception and idea remains for ever unresolved. Therefore we shall escape into the sphere of poetry where we may hope to find some satisfaction'.

It is this impulse (which Goethe hardly ever allows to get the better of him), this emphasis on the superiority of the inner vision as against a spiritually barren external world, that ever since has dominated European poetry. This trend became more and more conspicuous with time, so that the Romantics whom Goethe rejected seem almost Realists compared with the later excesses of inwardness perpetrated by the Symbolists. The great significance of Goethe in the history of the European mind lies in the fact that he is the last great poet who lived and worked in a continual effort to save the life of poetry and the poetry of life. All his fundamental scientific ideas are capable of expansion into pure poetic vision. *The Metamorphosis of Plants* is the title not only of a biological treatise, but also of a poem, and the *Theory of Colours* extends into some of the best verses of his later years. It is the same principle that informs his poetry as well as his science, his *Faust* and his *Theory of Colours*:

that 'all that is transient is but a symbol', and 'everything that exists is an analogy of existence itself'. Thus Goethe is not merely against Newton, but also against the Romantics and against Beethoven; for it is no more the artist's business to melt away the solid reality of symbolic living forms in the hot paroxysms of the inner life, than it is the scientist's to tyrannize these symbols of eternity which surround our temporal existence into the subjective abstractions of mathematical reasoning, for, Goethe asks, 'what is there exact in mathematics except its own exactitude?'

At times he is convinced that his science is of far greater historical importance than his poetry. 'Two things are necessary for a man to make an epoch in the world', he once said to Eckermann, 'first to have a good brain, and then to come into a big fortune. Napoleon inherited the French Revolution, Frederick the Great the Silesian War, Luther the obscurantism of the monks, and to my lot have fallen the errors of Newtonian physics. The present generation has, of course, no idea what I have achieved in this field; but future ages will confess that in my time I had come into no small fortune.' Perhaps he was not quite so wrong after all. Can one not discern a very marked echo of Goethe's voice in the following sentence of the physicist Heisenberg: 'The dangers threatening modern science cannot be averted by more and more experimenting, for our complicated experiments have no longer anything to do with nature in her own right, but with nature changed and transformed by our own cognitive activity.'

It was Goethe's ambition to play in the history of thought the role of another Francis Bacon, insisting on not merely pragmatic, but what he understood to be objective dealings with nature; or that of an Immanuel Kant of the Objective Reason. He said in a review of a scientific work: 'A man, born and bred in the so-called exact sciences will, on the height of his analytical reason, not easily comprehend that there is also something like an exact concrete imagination.' This exact concrete imagination is the glory of Goethe's poetry, and he knew that it was the great instrument of truth. 'Beauty', he says, 'is the manifestation of secret laws of nature which, were it not for their being revealed through beauty, would have remained unknown for ever.' All searches, discoveries and inventions, thrust on a world which is through these very activities and achievements progressively alienated from that truth which resides in the imagination and in a precise vision rather than in abstract formulae of the fittingness, beauty and significance of things, would ultimately spend themselves, Goethe feared, in the vain and desperate fidgetings of the good intention to make hell a better place to live in.

THE UNCOMIC PUN

KENNETH MUIR

IN his essay on *The Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age* Dryden complained that even so correct an author as Jonson

was not free from the lowest and most grovelling kind of wit, which we call clenches, of which *Every Man in his Humour* is infinitely full; and, which is worse, the wittiest persons in the drama speak them.

Shakespeare was likewise guilty of 'the jingle of a more poor paronomasia'. What to the Elizabethans had been natural and satisfying had come to seem tasteless and unnatural. A hundred years after Dryden the gulf between the taste of Shakespeare and that of his critics was wider than ever. Dr Johnson complained in his great Preface:

A quibble is to *Shakespeare*, what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity or profundity of his disquisition, whether he be enlarging knowledge or exalting affection, whether he be amusing attention with incidents, or en chaining it in suspense, let but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation. A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it, by the sacrifice of reason, propriety and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal *Cleopatra* for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.

Some attempt to revive the pun was made in the circles of Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt, but their puns were always used for comic purposes; and in the humorous verse of Thomas Hood the pun was turned out mechanically as an end in itself. The popularity of this sort of quibble made it difficult to defend Shakespeare's very different use of it, though Coleridge in his lectures made a half-hearted attempt. In answer to Richard's question to Gaunt 'Can sick men play so nicely with their names?' Coleridge replies:

Yes! on a death-bed there is a feeling which may make all things appear but as puns and equivocations. And a passion there is

that carries off its own excess by plays on words as naturally and, therefore, as appropriately to drama, as by gesticulations, looks, or tones. This belongs to human nature as such, independently of associations and habits from any particular rank of life or mode of employment . . . No doubt, something of Shakespeare's punning must be attributed to his age, in which direct and formal combats of wit were a favourite pastime of the courtly and accomplished. It was an age more favourable, upon the whole, to vigour of intellect than the present, in which a dread of being thought pedantic dispirits and flattens the energies of original minds. But independently of this, I have no hesitation in saying that a pun, if it be congruous with the feeling of the scene, is not only allowable in the dramatic dialogue, but oftentimes one of the most effectual intensives of passion.

Elsewhere Coleridge argues that if punning is the lowest, it is at all events the most harmless, kind of wit, because it never excites envy; and he suggests that

this form of speech is generally produced by a mixture of anger and contempt, and punning is a natural mode of expressing them.

At the present day, with one or two exceptions to which I shall refer, it is still usual to deplore the bad taste of the age in which Shakespeare lived, which could enjoy such a low form of humour; or at least to excuse Shakespeare on the grounds that he is less guilty of quibbling than his contemporaries. But as a matter of fact Shakespeare is fonder of the quibble than Jonson, Marlowe or Webster, and perhaps than any of his contemporaries; and we can scarcely excuse him by pretending that he fell into bad company.

Yet it is quite needless to be apologetic about Shakespeare's puns. The comic ones justify themselves as amusing examples of contemporary wit, heightened no doubt for dramatic purposes; and however much we have been taught at school that such wit is unworthy to evoke our laughter, it continues to do so. But tragedies, no less than comedies, contain numerous puns; and they are used at moments which make it impossible to suppose that Shakespeare intended a laugh. In editing *Macbeth* I have been struck by the prevalence of puns, many of which have been left unnoted, if not unnoticed, by previous commentators; and I propose in this article to examine a number of the puns and quibbles in this play and try to classify them so as to determine their dramatic function.

The first thing one notices, as I have suggested, is that few of the puns are used for comic purposes. Only in the one semi-comic scene of the play, the Porter scene, are the puns intended to arouse laughter.

We may instance the following piece of dialogue, which contains a large number of quibbles:

PORTRER . . . Therefore much Drinke may be said to be an Equivocator with Lecherie: it makes him, but it marres him; it sets him on, and it takes him off; it perswades him, and disheartens him; makes him stand too, and not stand too: in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleepe, and giving him the Lye, leaves him.

MACDUFF I beleeve, Drinke gave thee the Lye last Night.

PORTRER That it did, Sir, i' the very Throat on me: but I requited him for his Lye, and (I thinke) being too strong for him, though he tooke up my Legges sometimes, yet I made a Shift to cast him.

Here there are quibbles on *lie*, which can mean 'falsehood', or 'sexual intercourse', or be a term in wrestling, and on *cast*, which can mean 'throw' (in wrestling again), 'vomit', or 'urinate'. The purpose of these puns was clearly to arouse laughter by equivocatory references to obscene subjects, although, indeed, the Porter's mention of Equivocation recalls the equivocator 'who could not equivocate to heaven' and the 'equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth'.

But if we turn to a quibble in the preceding scene, it is obvious that there, just after the murder of Duncan, laughter was the last thing that Shakespeare intended. Lady Macbeth announces that she will try to incriminate the grooms by daubing them with Duncan's blood in these words:

If he doe bleed,
Ile guild the Faces of the Groomes withall,
For it must seeme their Guilt.

It is difficult for us to put ourselves in the place of Shakespeare's original audience. Clearly such a quibble was not meant to be funny. It was intended rather to suggest the overwrought condition of Lady Macbeth's nerves and her contempt for her husband's lack of self-control. It has the effect, moreover, of reinforcing the logical sequence with a phonic sequence. To an audience, though not to a reader, the similarity of *gild* and *guilt* seems to clinch the sentence. It should also be noted that the image of gilding looks forward to Macbeth's description of Duncan's corpse —

His Silver skinne, lac'd with his Golden Blood.

Another quibble of the same simple kind occurs in the scene in England, where Rosse brings the news of the murder of Macduff's family:

Your Castle is surpriz'd: your Wife, and Babes
 Savagely slaughter'd: To relate the manner
 Were on the Quarry of these murther'd Deere
 To add the death of you. —

where *deer* is part of the metaphor of the chase, but also a quibbling reference to Macduff's dear ones. Here again laughter is the last thing that Shakespeare wanted.

Most of the other puns are more subtle, and less apparent, than these. There are a large number of concealed quibbles, of which Shakespeare himself was probably unconscious; as, for example, when Macbeth addresses Night before the murder of Banquo:

Come, seeling Night,
 Skarfe up the tender Eye of pittifull Day,
 And with thy bloodie and invisible Hand
 Cancell and teare to pieces that great Bond,
 Which keepes me pale.

Here the word *seeling* — a term in falconry referring to the way hawks were tamed by stitching up their eyelids with a thread tied behind the head — suggested the word *bond* by way of *sealing*; and *bond* suggested *pale*, Macbeth's white face resembling parchment, and, as a bond is also a fetter, it may also have suggested *pale* in the sense of fenced-in land.

Similarly, in the preceding scene Macbeth tells the murderers:

Now, if you have a station in the file,
 Not i' th'worst ranke of Manhood, say't . . .

where *file* in the old sense of catalogue suggested *rank*, by way of *file* in the military sense. There is another example in the last act of the play when Macbeth remarks:

this push
 Will cheere me ever, or dis-seate me now . . .

where *cheer* suggested *dis-seat* through the intermediate *chair*, the pronunciation of the two words being similar. Or again, in the scene of the discovery of the murder of Duncan Macbeth declares:

The Wine of Life is drawne, and the meere Lees
 Is left this Vault, to brag of. —

where *wine* and *lees* both suggest the vault, which may be either a wine-cellar, a tomb, or the vaulted arch of the sky.

Sometimes the use of overt or concealed puns causes an ambiguity, which enables the passage to be interpreted in two different ways; and it is not always possible to be sure whether Shakespeare was conscious of both meanings, or of one only, and if of one only which

of the two. In the scene in which Macduff visits Malcolm in England, the latter is suspicious of his visitor because he thinks that he may be seeking to betray him to Macbeth. He tells him:

A good and vertuous Nature may recoyle
In an Imperiall charge.

This is generally taken to mean — ‘give way under pressure from a monarch’. The image may be either that of retiring before the charge or onslaught of a superior force, or that of a gun which recoils when the charge is too great. *Charge* can thus mean ‘duty’, ‘onslaught’ or ‘gunpowder’. The probability is that the word was suggested to Shakespeare by the double meaning of ‘recoil’. We weaken the effectiveness of the passage by ignoring the subsidiary meanings.

A similar example is to be found in *Romeo and Juliet* (iii, vi) in a passage which was the cause of a heated controversy in *The Times Literary Supplement* a year or two ago. When Juliet arrives at the Friar’s cell to be married, he announces her approach in these lines:

Here comes the Lady. Oh so light a foot
Will nere weare out the everlasting flint.
A Lover may bestride the Gossamer,
That ydles in the wanton Summer ayre,
And yet not fall, so light is vanitie.

One critic complained that the second of these lines was vacuous, since no foot, however heavy, will wear out the everlasting flint. He therefore urged that *nere* is ‘near’ rather than ‘ne’er’, and that *wear out* means ‘outwear’ or ‘outlast’, as in *King Lear* (v, iii, 17-18):

We’ll wear out
In a wall’d prison, packs and sects of great ones.

But it was pointed out that it was a commonplace of Latin and Elizabethan poetry that ‘even the lightest attrition in the end wears out even the hardest material’ and that ‘the Friar’s point is that Juliet’s step is so light as to defy a recognized law of nature’. Another critic argued that the image was suggested by an earlier one, a few lines before:

These violent delights have violent endes,
And in their triumph die; like fire and powder,
Which as they kisse consume.

This, I think, is probable, though I part company with this critic when he goes on to suggest that Shakespeare was referring to the new musket which was provided with a flint-lock, the flint of which was everlasting in comparison with the earlier iron pyrites; and that the

'light foot' of Juliet was an allusion to the lightly armed infantry, who would stand no chance against the deadly fire of the new musket. The lines are, in fact, a continuation of the Friar's warning to Romeo against violent delights:

Therefore Love moderately, long Love doth so,
Too swift arrives as tardie as too slow.

Then he sees Juliet flying to meet her lover and hardly seeming to touch the ground. She has her head in the clouds, and does not come down to solid rock or the flint of the pathway. The word 'light' is itself a kind of quibble: it means not only that Juliet weighs less than a hundredweight, but also that she is light as vanity, i.e. frivolous, out of touch with reality. This is surely the main meaning of the lines, though *light* was suggested by *delight* and the image of gunpowder, and *flint* was suggested either by the same gunpowder image or by the word *light*.

A more complicated example is to be found in the second act of *Macbeth*, just after the murder of Duncan, where the hero speaks of sleep:

Macbeth does murther Sleepe, the innocent Sleepe,
Sleepe that knits up the ravel'd Sleeve of Care,
The death of each dayes Life, sore Labors Bath,
Balme of hurt Mindes, great Natures second Course,
Chiefe nourisher in Life's Feast.

In the First Folio the word 'sleave' is spelt 'sleeve'; and a few commentators have assumed that the clause means 'knits up the frayed sleeve'. But nearly all editors have spelt the word 'sleave', which is defined as 'a slender filament of silk obtained by separating a thicker thread'. But it seems also to mean 'coarse silk', for Florio translates *sfilazza* as 'any kinde of ravelled stiffe, or sleave silke'. Macbeth's phrase would then mean 'knits up the tangled silk'. Both meanings are quite possible, and Shakespeare may have intended either, or both. Another phrase in this passage is also ambiguous. 'Great Nature's second course' probably means the second race or career after the death of each day's life; but, by a quibble, it suggested to Shakespeare the second course, in the sense of the joint or roast — pudding being in those days the first course. The succeeding phrase, 'Chief nourisher in Life's feast', may also have been suggested by another meaning of *ravelled*. Ravelled bread was made from flour and bran; and wholemeal bread, the staff of life, could be regarded as the chief nourisher — indeed a *whole meal* in itself.¹

¹ The passage owed something, perhaps, to a passage in GOLDING'S *Metamorphoses* (XI, 723ff):

Another example, for which I am partly indebted to Mr. S. L. Bethell, is to be found in Macbeth's soliloquy (I, vii):

If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
 It were done quickly: If th'Assassination
 Could trammell up the Consequence, and catch
 With his surcease, Successe: that but this blow
 Might be the be-all, and the end-all — heere,
 But heere, upon this Banke and Shoal of time,
 Wee'l d iumpe the life to come.

These seven lines contain a large number of ambiguities. 'Trammel up' can mean 'entangle, as in a net', 'fasten the legs of horses together, so that they cannot stray', or possibly 'hang up' — derived from a *trammel*, an iron device for suspending pots over a fire. 'Surcease' may be a legal term derived from the Old French *sursis*, meaning the stay of proceedings; in which case the pronoun *his* refers to *consequence*. But Shakespeare elsewhere uses the word as a euphemism for *die*:

If they surcease to be that should survive —

and it may here mean *death*, the pronoun referring to Duncan. 'Success' may be used in its ordinary modern sense, or it may mean *consequence* or *succession* to the throne. Editors have cheerfully plumped for a single meaning of each of these three words, and have dismissed all the other meanings out of hand. But Shakespeare and

Sweete sleepe, the peace of minde with whome crookt care is aye at ods:
 Which cherishest men's weary limbis appallid with toyling sore,
 And makest them as fresh to worke, and lustie as before.

AS SENECA'S *Hercules Furens* is echoed elsewhere in *Macbeth*, the phrase 'balm of hurt minds' may reflect the situation where the Chorus invokes sleep to cure the madness of Hercules. Jasper Heywood translates thus:

And thou O tamer best
 O sleepe of toyles, the quietnesse of mynde,
 Of all the lyfe of man the better part.

There is a similar passage in the first chorus of SENECA'S *Agamemnon*, which is also echoed elsewhere in *Macbeth*:

Sleepe that doth overcome and break the bonds of griefe.

There is also a parallel, pointed out by Malone, with the opening of Sidney's most famous sonnet:

Come Sleepe, O Sleepe, the certaine knot of peace,
 The baiting place of wit, the balme of woe.

With *knot*, *baiting*, *balme* and *woe* may be compared *knits*, *feast*, *balm* and *care*. Shakespeare seems also to have read the pirated edition (1591) of *Astrophel and Stella* which has *bathing* for *baiting*, a more obvious parallel to Macbeth's *bath*. Shakespeare's lines were probably created by an unconscious coalescence of the phrases of Ovid, Seneca and Sidney.

his audience presumably had more than one meaning at the backs of their minds. A more significant phrase is 'bank and shoal of time'. 'Shoal' is Theobald's brilliant emendation for the 'Schoole' of the Folio. This is now generally accepted, especially as 'schoole' is a possible seventeenth-century spelling of 'shoal'. Theobald explained,

This Shallow, this narrow Ford, of humane Life, opposed to the great Abyss of Eternity.

One or two critics, however, have argued for the original reading, taking 'bank' to mean 'bench'. Elwin paraphrased:

If here only, upon this bench of instruction, in this school of eternity, I could do this without bringing these, my pupils days, under suffering, I would hazard its effect on the endless life to come.

Mr. Bethell, who is one of the few modern critics to defend 'school', assumes that 'bank' is the judicial bench (O.F. *banc*), not the school bench. The word was certainly current in this sense in Shakespeare's time. Mr. Bethell argues that 'Time is thus seen as the period of judgment, testing, or "crisis", and as a school'.¹ If we reject this interpretation, as I think we must, it should not be because, as some have complained, it is less poetic — for it would not be very different from Keats's great parable of the world as a school and as a vale of soul-making — but because, in spite of Bethell's denial, Shakespeare often couples words together like 'bank and shoal', and because the preposition 'upon' fits 'bank', but not 'school'. The true explanation is that we have here another example of an unconscious pun. Shakespeare intended 'shoal'; but the alternative meaning of 'bank' would lead naturally to 'judgment' a few lines later and 'schoole' would suggest 'teach', 'instructions' and 'taught'.

But in these Cases

We still have judgement heere, that we but teach
Bloody Instructions, which being taught, returne
To plague th'Inventer.

In the same soliloquy the phrase 'Angels, Trumpet-tongu'd' is closely followed by the image of

Pitty, like a naked New-borne-Babe,
Striding the blast,

in which the blast of the storm was suggested by the blast of the trumpet. When Macbeth describes the discovery of the murder the phrase 'Breach in Nature' is linked by a pun with the word used to describe the daggers of the supposed murderers, 'Unmannerly breech'd with gore'. In the scene in England Malcolm declares:

¹ *The Winter's Tale*, 1947, pp. 126-7.

I should forge
 Quarrels unius against the Good and Loyall,
 Destroying them for wealth.

The surface meaning of these lines is plain enough; but as a *quarrel* was also a square-headed arrow for a cross-bow and Holinshed speaks of

crossebowes set readie bent with sharpe quarrels in them,
 Shakespeare probably used the verb *forge* with this secondary meaning of *quarrel* at the back of his mind.

The same thing may have happened in the scene before the murder of Banquo:

Light thickens,
 And the Crow makes Wing to th' Rookie Wood.

The primary meaning of *Rookie* is simply 'black and filled with rooks'; but many editors, since the carrion crow is not gregarious, have regarded the line as tautological and in need of emendation. They have therefore proposed a variety of words, including 'roky' (=misty), 'rouky' (=perching), 'reeky' (=steamy), and there is apparently a variant of this in Scots and Northern dialects — 'rooky' (=misty), 'rouky' (=chattering), and 'ruddy' (=multitudinous). If we combined these last two suggestions, we should get a portmanteau equivalent for the Meredithian phrase, 'multitudinous chatterings'. But we need not take too seriously these attempts to relieve the poet of the responsibility of writing one of his most magical lines, though it is possible that one of these dialectal words was hovering at the back of his consciousness when he used the word 'rooky' to mean something more straightforward.

In the same scene Lady Macbeth makes an ambiguous remark about Banquo and Fleance:

But in them, Natures Coppie's not eterne.

This is usually taken as a reference to copyhold, meaning that the tenure of their lives by Banquo and Fleance under nature would cease with their deaths — in other words, that they would not live for ever. Certainly there is another legal metaphor twelve lines later; but elsewhere Shakespeare invariably means by *copy* a thing to be copied or the result of imitation, and the phrase has been paraphrased 'the particular cast from Nature's mould'.

There are several examples of quibbling in the scene in England. Macduff, on hearing of Malcolm's suspicions of him, exclaims:

Bleed, bleed poore Country,
 Great Tyranny, lay thou thy basis sure,
 For goodnesse dare not check thee: wear thou thy wrongs,
 The Title is affear'd.

The last word is invariably emended to 'affeer'd', which means 'confirmed'; and the primary meaning of the passage is that the title of Macbeth to the country he rules is confirmed by the cowardice of the good. But 'The Title is affear'd' may also bear the meaning 'The rightful king is afraid'. Shakespeare was probably conscious of this pun as he must have been of the one a few lines later:

my Desire
All continent Impediments would ore-beare
That did oppose my will.

Here *continent* can mean either 'restraining' or 'chaste', and *will* means both 'lust' and 'determination'.

It is sometimes impossible to be sure which meaning Shakespeare intended. In the lines:

ere to black *Heccats* summons
The shard-borne Beetle, with his drowsie hums,
Hath rung Nights yawning Peale, there shall be done
A deed of dreadfull note —

the epithet *shard-borne* may mean either 'dung-bred' or 'borne on scaly wings': the Oxford Dictionary supports the former interpretation and most editors the latter. When Donalbain asks his brother:

What should be spoken here, where our Fate
Hid in an augure hole, may rush and seize us? —

Shakespeare may have been thinking of the passage in Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft* which refers to the way that witches can go in and out of auger-holes; or he may have meant merely that Donalbain thinks that his fate lurks in a hole made by a dagger. When Macbeth first conceives the murder of Duncan he declares:

My Thought, whose Murther yet is but fantasticall,
Shakes so my single state of Man,
That Function is smother'd in surmise.

It is usually supposed that in the phrase 'my single state of man' Shakespeare was referring to the microcosm, the little kingdom of man, as in Brutus's well-known lines:

the state of a man,
Like a little Kingdome, suffers then
The nature of an Insurrection.

But Steevens pointed out that 'double' and 'single' used to signify 'strong' and 'weak'; and 'single state' may mean no more than 'weak condition'.

One last example of ambiguity will suffice. In Act v, Scene ii, Menteith speaks of the English army led by Malcolm, Siward and Macduff:

Revenge burne in them: for their deere causes
Would to the bleeding, and the grim Alarne
Excite the mortified man.

The word *burn*, with its association with fever, suggested *dear causes*; for this phrase could mean 'sore diseases' as well as 'grievous wrongs' or 'grounds of action'. The sickness metaphor is continued in *bleeding* and *mortified* and in the later speech:

He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause
Within the belt of Rule.

Bleeding was, of course, a remedy for fever; but it may have been suggested by the superstition, mentioned by Holinshed in this part of the *Chronicles*, that the corpse of a murdered man bled afresh in the presence of the murderer. 'Excite the mortified man' may mean 'raise up the dead' or 'stir up the numbed' — *excite* being derived from *excitare*, to call forth, or quicken. The whole passage, therefore, means either that the justice of their cause would rouse even the dead to take an interest in the battle, or else that it would excite the sluggish to fight.

The examples that have been given, selected out of a much larger number in this one play, may suggest certain conclusions with regard to Shakespeare's use of the quibble. Previous critics have, of course, discussed the matter. As long ago as 1794 Walter Whiter pointed out that in Shakespeare's plays

Certain terms containing an equivocal meaning, or sounds suggesting such a meaning, will often serve to introduce other words and expressions of a similar nature: This similarity is formed by having in some cases a coincidence in sense, or an affinity from sound; though the signification, in which they are really applied, has never any reference and often no similitude to that, which caused their association.

Yet neither Whiter, nor Kellett in the present century, really examined the dramatic effect of the hidden puns they brought to light. The most valuable work on the subject is Mr Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, although in re-reading that pioneer work after a lapse of years even the most enthusiastic reader may feel that in many passages Mr Empson seems to be imposing his meanings on the poetry rather than interpreting what the poets actually wrote. He analyses the different kinds of ambiguity with great subtlety, though he is not directly concerned with the dramatic effect of puns.

A recent American critic, Mr Cleanth Brooks, in his book *The Well Wrought Urn*, has admirable chapters on 'The Language of Paradox' and 'The Heresy of Paraphrase', but he is concerned more with ambiguities than with actual puns and he seems to regard the paradox as the chief criterion of poetry.

There are four main functions of the serious pun in dramatic poetry. First, puns — and especially hidden puns — provide as we have seen an illogical reinforcement of the logical sequence of thought, so that the poetic statement strikes us almost as a remembrance — as Keats said that poetry should do. Secondly, such puns often link together unrelated imagery and act as solvents for mixed metaphors. Thirdly, they make the listener aware of a complex of ideas which enrich the total statement, even though they do not come into full consciousness. Fourthly, they seem to shoot out roots in all directions, so that the poetry is firmly based on reality — a reality which is nothing less, if nothing more, than the sum total of experience.

It is no accident that the best period of English drama, from 1590 to 1625 coincided with the poetry of the metaphysical school. Donne used the serious pun in much the same way as the dramatists, and to him and his fellows it served as a means in conjunction with the imagery of enriching the complexity of a poem. No one now imagines that his 'Hymn to God the Father' is insincere or frivolous because in each stanza it repeats the pun:

When thou hast done, thou hast not done.

It will be remembered, too, that the pun was used by divines as well as by poets. Lancelot Andrewes obtained some of his most splendid effects by means of the quibble, as in the well-known passage from one of the Nativity sermons:

The *Word* was made flesh. I add yet further: what *flesh*? The flesh of an *Infant*. What, *Verbum Infans*, the *Word* an *Infant*? The *Word*, and not be able to speak a word? How evill agreeth this?

The detailed dissection of the text, which is a characteristic of many sermons of the period, displays the same kind of interest in words as the poets did in their quibbles. Another passage by Lancelot Andrewes will illustrate this point:

First, by *Solvite* (that is) *dissolving* is meant *death*. *Cupio dissolvi*, ye know what that is: And *tempus dissolutionis meae instat*, the *time of my dissolution* (that is, *my death*) is at hand. For, *death*, is a very *dissolution*: a *loosing* the cement, the soule, and bodie are held together with. Which two, as a *frame* or *fabrique* are compaginate at first; and after, as the *timber* from

the *lime*, or the *lime* from the *stone*, so are they taken in sunder againe. But *death*, is not, this way only, a *loosing*; but a further than this. For upon the *loosing* the *soule* from the *body*, and the life from both, there followes an universall *loosing*, of all the bonds and knots here: of the *Father* from the *Son*; and otherwhile, of the *Son* from the *Father* first: Of *Man* from *Wife*, of *friend* from *friend*, of *Prince* from *People*: So great a *Solvite* is *death*; makes all, that is fast, *loose*: makes all knots flie in sunder. (Andrewes, *XCVI Sermons*, 1641, p. 485.)

A third example may be given, in which Donne plays on the two meanings of heaven, as a place and as a state:

For all the way to Heaven is Heaven; and as those Angels, which came from Heaven hither, bring Heaven with them, and are in Heaven here, So that soule that goes to Heaven, meets Heaven here; and as those Angels doe not devest Heaven by coming, so these soules invest Heaven, in their going. (Sermon LXVI, ed. Q, 1921, p. 55.)

There are two things wrong with the verse tragedies of the age of Dryden. The poets did not take their subjects seriously; they merely played with them, even when the stage was littered with corpses: and they virtually adopted for poetry as well as prose the fatal canons of the Royal Society, which exhibited an essentially static attitude to language. Dryden is said to have written his plays first in prose, and then translated them into verse. Whether this is true or not, his remarks about the style of Shakespeare and Chapman show that the tradition of dramatic poetry had been fatally interrupted during the Commonwealth period. The Restoration dramatists were admirably lucid, but their use of language was, in the last resort, unimaginative. The banishing of the pun except for comic purposes was the symbol of a radical defect: it was a turning away from the genius of the language. If we consider the tragedies of Young and Thomson, the unactable closet dramas of the Romantic poets, and the still more abortive plays of the great Victorians, the lack of a living tradition of dramatic verse is even more apparent. Not till the 'thirties of the present century did we get anything resembling good dramatic verse.

Great drama went out with the serious pun because by its use Shakespeare and other Jacobean dramatists were able to bring into their plays a much wider range of experience. The texture of nearly all the poetic dramas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was intolerably thin; and it is significant that with the renaissance of poetic drama in the last twenty years, disappointing though it has been, we have had the return of the quibble and of the conceit. I am thinking particularly of Mr Eliot's plays and, on a different level,

Mr Christopher Fry's *The Lady's not for Burning* which is now delighting audiences with its verbal acrobatics.

It is not so much the pun itself that should be defended with uncompromising vigour, but the attitude to language which the use of the quibble demands. Language is called upon to perform two main functions — to convey thoughts, and to express feelings or states of mind. For the former function an unemotive, precise language is required. If we want to talk about the theory of relativity or nuclear fission, we should be as unambiguous and as straightforward as possible in our use of language — though certain modern scientific writers seem to lose themselves in metaphors and analogies. But if we are expressing complicated human feelings, the more scientifically precise we are, the greater the distortion. Where the human mind is in question we must take into consideration that the language has a life of its own, that every word has a different pedigree and a different emotive history, and that its relationships and derivations necessarily suggest to the speaker and to the listener the kind of association which is, in its most obvious form, the pun. In Henry Moore's sculpture it is always possible to perceive how his actual medium has influenced the finished work of art. He has collaborated, as it were, with the grain and texture of the wood or the markings on the stone so that his reclining figures look almost as if they were works of nature rather than works of man — figures that were inherent in the tree or stone. In much the same way the artist in words must collaborate with the genius of the language. If he tries to write without due regard to his medium, his work will be thin, artificial and sterile. We can only master language by submitting to it.

ON BEING AN ENGLISHMAN IN 1950

PETER LASLETT

I CAN'T help being an Englishman on this 1950th anniversary of the Christian era, for I was born into that nationality and have never had a real opportunity of choosing to adopt another. This is true of nearly every one of us who live in this central tract of the largest of the British islands. Indeed it would seem scarcely worth pointing out, far less being defensive about, if it were not for the attitude towards us of other people, particularly in the Americas, many of whom have been able to exercise such a choice. They seem to feel themselves at liberty to reproach me for my Englishness as if it were something I had picked out for myself, like my wife or the colour of my ties.

Often, too often I feel, people seem to hold me responsible for English vices as if I must approve and will defend them. They attribute to me English virtues as if I must be possessed of them, indeed as if I had deliberately chosen that they should exist. They go further than this. They refer to the crimes and stupidities perpetrated by Englishmen in the course of an exceptionally long and eventful history as if I shall feel bound to accept some moral responsibility for them. So I find myself reproached with the villainies of Clive in India, or with the iniquity of John Hawkins in taking negroes to America, even with the presumptuous conceit of Henry VIII in breaking with the Pope and founding the first National Church.

My responsibility is held to be even greater when it is a question of geography rather than history. The attitude taken up by the English community in Hong Kong, or the behaviour of my countrymen in Cairo, Montevideo and Teheran are held to be my concern, as if I could be reasonably expected to conduct myself in just the way those other Englishmen do. In short it is assumed that I regard English society as an extension in time and space of my own personality and that I habitually identify myself with the actions of the English state.

Now this is an important little intellectual trick, this assimilation of the self-respect of the individual into the dignity and power of the state of which he is a subject. It has, indeed, been the secret of the success of nationalism as a system of politics ever since it was invented, probably in England, in late medieval times. It is still so much a feature of people's subconscious assumptions about politics that the class 'Englishmen' could be defined as those who do accept English society as an extension of their personalities and the actions

of the English state as their own. That it remains, nevertheless, a piece of chicanery, is what I hope to demonstrate by this analysis of what it means to me to be an Englishman in 1950. My predecessors and contemporaries as Englishmen may have been willing to shoulder the responsibility of such an identification without complaint. It is my case that the recent history of the world in general and of our community in particular requires that we would all do well to abandon it.

At about the time that the English brought forth their nationalism, western Europe burst open and became a world civilization. Because of geography, the centre of this new civilization tended to take up its station in north-western Europe and finally in England; the Englishman, who had always been somewhat insular and provincial, became also powerful and arrogant. He found that he could identify his glorification of his nation state with the triumph of western civilization as a whole: by the reign of Queen Victoria he consciously felt himself to be the supreme achievement of western culture, the originator and the upholder of that new world order which was to supersede all that had gone before.

This was the situation only a short yesterday ago. It created the atmosphere I was brought up in. I cannot remember feeling a catch of mistrust in that pure doctrine of the patent superiority of everything English which I absorbed in my boyhood. It was indeed an admirable system, for it was self-sealing — our weaknesses appeared as the signs of our overwhelming superiority. English political institutions, English legal custom, industrial methods which nearly all had their origins in England, the English language, even English clothes, food, social conventions and sports, were all, I supposed, acknowledged as supreme wherever their influence had penetrated. It was true that our political supremacy was not quite as important to the maintenance of *Pax Britannica* as the letters S.P.Q.R. had been in that other world order, the only comparable world order, *Pax Romana*. It was even true that certain things in our recent history unmistakably pointed to a relative decline in our power — American industrial might, the defection of the Irish, the Statute of Westminster. But these things could be beautifully rationalized so as to leave unshaken in each English individual that self-confidence which comes from the conviction of being one of the world's natural rulers: was not this the technique of English success? Were we not so powerful that we could afford to give up unimportant things? It would indeed have been impossible for a man to grow up into that sort of atmosphere and yet be prepared to realize almost as soon as he was mature that it had become an anomaly overnight. The configuration of world forces which had made it possible, and which had existed unchanged for upwards of ten generations, had suddenly disappeared.

There were one or two hints of what was about to come upon us. I remember speculating in the years before 1939 about the conditions which brought about a Silver Age in a great political power and in the society which went with it. Would the English in their Silver Age recapture the grace and dignity of Rome — or even of their more recent predecessors, Spain and France? We were conscious, too, that the imperial tradition which some of our fathers and grandfathers had tried to establish was not only nonsense, it was very wicked nonsense too: for many of us were Little Englanders. But however progressive we were, however willing to give up all title by conquest and exploitation, it was necessarily too great an effort of imagination for us to realize how we would feel if we suddenly found ourselves in the process of being stripped of all those titles, not voluntarily but by outside compulsion.

In the event, Great Britain lost her world superiority far more quickly than did any power in the past which had risen to a comparable position; far more quickly than Spain or France, far more quickly than Rome; and how laughable it seems now that we could ever have thought in 1939 that anything as durable as the Roman Empire was going in to fight Hitler, the new barbarian. It is now appearing that Britain began to decline much earlier than 1939, or even 1914, and that the process went much further than even her enemies had suspected. But it is the rate of diminution of consequence in these last ten years which matters most to us in 1950, and it has been, and still is, truly phenomenal. Even more surprising, and more traumatic, is the waning of influence of all the English-speaking peoples. Not only is the intellectual importance of England growing daily less than that of the United States, but the Anglo-Saxon attitude itself gets more and more backward rather than forward looking.

One of the difficulties of being an Englishman in 1950 is the persistent delusion that it is after the deluge. It is not. The deluge is still with us, if it means the very rapid shift in the parallelogram of world forces which is making Great Britain's position relatively weaker and weaker. Though we may have been largely unconscious of our decline before 1939, the rude shocks of 1940 and 1941 forced us for a time into recognizing our weakness, a weakness which we regarded as temporary. Since then we have suffered from the complicated way in which we were defeated in the war. The conflict of 1939-45 was disastrous for us: only the Germans lost more than we did. We lost to the same people as the Germans, to the Americans above all, then to the nations of the Commonwealth and to those directly subjected to our power, after that to countries like Brazil and Argentina which had been in a vaguely colonial relation with the Great Powers, and finally to the Soviet Union.

Our defeat was indirect and complex, and so it is now very difficult for us to understand. It puzzles us that we should be in debt to the Americans for a sum so big that we have given up reckoning it in currency, if only because the U.S. was so recently indebted to us. It is a mysterious thing that we now owe money to India and Egypt, whose railways we built, whose finances we directed, whose currency has always been dependent on our own. We find ourselves baffled rather than humiliated by the necessity of accepting insults from Argentina, for we had been brought up to believe that we literally owned the place. Odder still is the discovery that we are no longer the progressive power, in Europe or anywhere else; the English Revolution is *démodé*, the Russian Revolution is now the intellectually important one. It would be far easier for us to grasp what has happened if, like France, we had experienced military defeat and occupation during the war. We were vanquished by economic forces, and economics are difficult to understand.

However dimly the Englishman sees the truth about himself and his country, our new condition does have some obvious effects on the way we behave. One of them is the outburst of affection for symbols of sovereignty, the Crown as a concept and the Royal personages themselves. Today the English behave about the Royal family in the way that Anglophilic Americans and the more loyal parts of the Commonwealth have always behaved. This may be in part due to the drabness of life in post-war London, but there is much force in the psychologists' argument that it is simply compensation for a feeling of diminished importance.

Then again there is the extraordinarily unrealistic attitude to the British Empire taken up by the Tory party. They make the traditional imperialistic clichés into a major plank in their political platform: indeed it seems to be the one appeal which they are certain is a vote-getter with the whole populace. Jingoism is clearly an irrelevant issue in Great Britain and in the world as they are today, but the Tories are not using it simply out of habit. They are relying on the fact that the British voter is looking for reassurance about the destiny of his country; he wants a prop for his self-confidence.

Even more extraordinary are the intellectual acrobatics now being described by the official theorists of the British Commonwealth, not party propagandists, but responsible ministers and distinguished professors of political theory. Our apologists for that glorious abstraction, that incorporeal, metaphysical entity — the bond between the Dominions and the Homeland — seem to be able to produce an entirely new theory of association every three months. They have to, so as to take into account the recalcitrance of South Africa, or the objection of India to the British Crown, even Eire's downright rejection of any sort of connection whatsoever with

England. The word for all this is 'rationalization', our method of reconciling ourselves to the unpleasant facts.

Symptoms like these are disquieting: it almost looks as if we are losing our aptitude for dying gracefully, as if we had forgotten Donne's admonition: 'So let us melt, and make no noise.' This is very un-English. It certainly is not the way which was taken by the English aristocracy to make their quietus for themselves. But much more disturbing to the Englishman in this first year of the second half of the twentieth century is his sudden consciousness of the unpopularity of his nationality in the world. This is not quite new. Indeed the traditional arrogance of the Englishman has been due in some part to the fear, or the feeling, that he was disliked. It is only since the recent sudden check to our self-confidence that as individuals we have ceased to be able to interpret the signs of the world's resentment as evidence of our own superiority.

It is indeed alarming to reckon up the reasons why people should feel hostile to the English. Such hostility is a tradition in Europe, and especially in western Europe which now finds itself committed to some sort of permanent association with us. There we are looked upon as the overrich and over-powerful English, who are really an integral part of the European community, but who insist on being regarded as a world power, independent of any continent. In the Americas our misfortune is that we have always been the symbol of European overlordship, the only colonizing power whose contribution could not be easily explained away by the nationalist sentiment of American states. This has reserved for us a peculiar dislike in all those parts of the world where the population is of European origin, even in the countries which we insist are still inside our 'Commonwealth', ci-devant 'British Commonwealth'. Outside this area people have far simpler grounds for resenting the English. To the Russians and to those around them, we are the closest bulwark of the Beast, which for them is world Capitalism: we are the next best hated of the oppressors of the working people. Amongst the really imposing masses of the human race we still are, or until lately were, actually in office as alien rulers, not simply economic exploiters, but the very embodiment of those forces of material efficiency which have humiliated and subjugated the Indians, the Chinese, the Africans and 'native' populations everywhere.

But when I think of myself as an Englishman, I suffer more than a vague feeling of disquiet because the English are unpopular. Occasionally I am humiliated. I have had to use the word 'Englishman' here, and not 'Briton' or 'Britisher', because I have learnt to expect quite painful assaults on my self-esteem from the other countries which share the British Isles with us. It seems that those who have had to live the longest and the closest to the English have the liveliest

contempt for them: the Scottish and Welsh Nationalists, above all the now triumphantly, insultingly independent Irish. Not that Celtic resentment is all that we have to put up with. I cannot pretend to like it when I read in the paper that a country like Iraq refuses to ratify a treaty signed with all due formality with the British Foreign Minister at the great English naval base of Portsmouth. I must confess that I feel emotionally indignant when I see that Guatemala has announced that British Honduras is now a part of Guatemalan territory, or that Chile now credits herself with those Antarctic territories which were discovered and explored by Englishmen of the old heroic mould. News like this is a shock to me: I glance at the head of the column rather than study it sentence by sentence. I don't like to dwell on it. It is the same with the most anti-imperialist of my countrymen, however far to the left they may be. They still find it difficult to be pleased to find that progressive opinion all over the world condemns them simply because of their nationality. It not only abominates the British imperial system as obsolete and dangerous but also seems to suppose that the influence and ideas of Englishmen are obstacles to the new world which is struggling to be born. The disquiet of the English progressives is quite simply explained. Their pride and self-confidence are still bound up with the prestige of the nation we all belong to.

In all these ways, then, being an Englishman in 1950 is a liability to my peace of mind. There are other ways, of course, in which it adds to my complacency, and it would be foolish to pretend that my nationality is a source of nothing but irritation and frustration to me. Nor does it seem likely to become so as this second half of our twentieth century unfolds itself, though things will probably get worse rather than better. But there is one development which has been a characteristic of English society ever since Victoria died which may reasonably be expected to continue, a development which gives great and genuine satisfaction to some of our generation of Englishmen and certainly to me. The attitude which we like to adopt when we wish to impress, the attitude we should strike if we were to be called upon to have our national photograph taken, is that of the mentor, the hesitant and somewhat retiring instructor of others, a teacher notwithstanding a lack of intellectual interest and a sense of mission — 'Goodbye, Mr Chips' on a national scale. Now the lesson we have been teaching to recent generations and which we are in the middle of demonstrating now, is the working out of a way to reconcile an equitable economic system with genuine freedom for the individual. This is not simply an achievement of Fabian socialism, though it is obviously the English socialists who would be most likely to point to it if called upon to justify their Englishness, for it is nothing more than the most recent instance of

what has been called our being able to change at the appropriate speed in time. It is the twentieth-century fruit of that lofty, slow-grown tree of English political maturity. The knowledge that the English are going on making this demonstration to the other peoples of the world adds to my happiness.

There are others I know, and among them some who would not share the pride I take in this particular development, who would raise this eleemosynary faculty of ours into a general claim to virtue. They point to the enormous influence which English political doctrine, even when inculcated with the use of military conquest and political subjugation, has had on political practice all over the world. Britain, they say, can never lose her reputation as the great school of political behaviour, with pupils who have learnt with varying degrees of success, not to follow Britain's imperialistic attitudes but her less regrettable political example. France may have given Europe a Declaration of Rights, but what the world recognizes as justice was until yesterday what the Englishman knew as his Common Law rights. If we can no longer, without illusion, take pride in the power of a ruler, we can, with much less illusion, take an oblique pride in our influence as a tutor — pitied, of course, as all tutors are, regarded as hopelessly out of date, but still the greatest single influence on political belief and behaviour which the world has known since the Roman Empire.

It is possible to gain keen satisfaction from considerations like these without ever yielding to the pseudo-proposition which is concealed in nationalism. But however much better pleased with ourselves we feel when we think of such things, they do not possess the emotional efficacy of the full-blooded victories of the British Lion, the effulgent glory of the British Raj. I am, I suppose, an intellectually minded person and so can get a great deal more satisfaction out of this sort of achievement than many of my countrymen. I certainly feel a sense of warm well-being when I reckon up the reasons why England can consider herself better educated, politically wiser, culturally more mature than any other community in the world. But even for me they do not make up for the repeated assaults on my vanity which come from the decline in our material power. It is like trying to compensate for the athletic failures of a college by pointing to its academic successes. It is really no solace and you realize that no one should be competitive about that sort of thing, anyway.

This comparison with athletic success and the satisfaction and frustration which it brings to people is a suggestive one. However great the vicarious triumph which a man feels in the victories of his favourite team, and however bitter his feelings when it is defeated, there comes a point when he ceases to be interested. If a run of

defeats lasts long enough he will suddenly realize that all this self-abasement about a game is against reason. He may then transfer his allegiance to another team, or he may decide that he must find a more satisfactory outlet for that sort of emotion. He may be quite successful in doing this and end by losing all interest in that particular game, or even cease to feel the need of being interested in any sport. More likely he will believe for the time that the Rangers or the Yorkshire County Cricket Club mean nothing to him, only to find that he is as pleased as ever he had been when they recover their chances for the County Championship or the League Competition.

In other words in this sort of thing men are notoriously recidivist. Nevertheless they can adjust their methods of maintaining their sense of well-being so as to be independent of the competitive efficiency of a larger body outside themselves. It is perfectly possible to be happy as the member of a political society which has no claim whatsoever to be the strongest or the largest or the most advanced or the oldest or the most attractive in the world. It is extremely doubtful if the sum total of the personal happiness of individuals in Spain or in Holland was any less during the centuries of their slow decline from world power than it was during the generations of their rise. Indeed I think it is undeniable that only the emotionally impoverished person, in extremer cases the neurotic person, can possibly be seriously affected by the ups and downs in the prestige either of his ball team or of his nation state.

So being an Englishman in 1950 has begun I think to unravel for me that little intellectual trick of nationalism with which I began. I find myself less disposed to believe that my self-respect is necessarily bound up with the prestige which is accorded to the nation state to which I belong. The necessity of taking to myself every insult that is offered to the Flag has tended to become just a little of a nuisance. It has happened too often. I have begun to lose interest, just as people lose interest in a series of Test Matches when one side has won the third match out of five. It begins to look as if the thing simply should not be allowed to matter as much as it seems to do to most people. Life is easier and my self-respect is safer if I cease to feel as if I am personally involved in everything that is done to and by the British Empire.

It must be quite obvious that a confession like this comes very near to the denial of patriotism. But before I go on to consider such a charge, I would like to point out that the position I have reached in this somewhat flippant way has been occupied for a long time by more serious students of the international dilemma of the middle of the twentieth century. They reach it by telling over to themselves, and to us, the manifold arguments about the idiocy of the doctrine of national sovereignty. They have founded all sorts of societies to

keep themselves, and us again, reminded of the facts about the atomic bomb, biological warfare and so on. Garry Davis indeed has gone so far as to revive the technique of Diogenes and his tub. In England we are fortunate because we have been given another, rather more commonplace, opportunity to realize that nationalism is nonsense. Perhaps we shall be more securely converted than is possible by intellectual conviction.

It may well be that being an Englishman with my sort of experience has made me unpatriotic in the accepted sense of the term, in the sense intended by Nurse Cavell when she said that 'Patriotism is not enough'. But the issue is rather more serious than that. For it might turn out that the future of the whole world will depend on the capacity of Englishmen to be realistic about the decline of their power. It seems obvious that the major weakness of the system of government as it is now established over the surface of the globe is that it still places a grossly disproportionate share of responsibility on the 50,000,000 people who live in these islands.

Britain has commitments far greater than she could possibly fulfil; she is expected to provide protection and good governance on a scale which is suited only to a great power of a truly twentieth-century stature. The presence of an organization of such vastness with inadequate resources to meet its possible obligations is bound to make for an unstable world. In certain specific situations — like that of December 1941 in the Pacific — and in certain specific places — Hong Kong could well be one of them — insistence on its traditional rights by a power in decline leads perilously quickly to war. The rapid subsidence of Great Britain can only give rise to situations of this sort if individual Englishmen deceive themselves about the strength of their country and take an unrealistic view of the importance of national prestige. The peace of the world depends therefore on the Englishman being able to reconcile himself to a continuous diminution in the consequence of his country. This can only be done if he can learn, and learn quickly enough, to separate his personal prestige from the prestige of his nation state. It can only be done in fact by an exposure of the intellectual trick concealed in nationalism. Patriotism, for me at least, must be given a definition which leaves that sort of spuriousness on one side.

But being an Englishman in 1950, if it seems to take away all the reasons for an Englishman's traditional arrogance, also provides him with a justification for a feeling of superiority of quite another kind. It gives him a right to a sort of amused tolerance as he watches other communities furiously striving to work up their nationalism to the pitch of perfection which it reached in England under our good Queen Victoria. It is most diverting and least alarming in the case of the Americans. It is diverting because such statements as

'My country right or wrong' and such institutions as a 'Committee of Un-American Activities' look so absurd in a people who otherwise appear sensible, and even mature. They also remind us of the similar absurdities which we can laugh at in ourselves: indeed I doubt if America will ever rise to a Colonel Blimp or such a sentence as 'Remember, sir, the wogs begin at Calais'. But it is not very alarming because we are confident that American nationalism is unlikely to make an enemy of us and also, perhaps, because we are so impressed by the American capacity to learn from our experience and avoid our mistakes. Nevertheless American patriotism does seem to have its ugly side: sometimes it looks as if the marshalling of national sentiment behind the anti-communist movement inside and outside the U.S.A. will end by destroying all those elements of tolerance and respect for personal conviction which we regard as the common heritage of our two countries.

But it is the young countries which make Englishmen really sad — sad in their best patronizing manner. Sometimes they even frighten us a little. For these purposes Russia must be counted a young country, although her traditions go much further back than America's and are indeed more ancient in some ways than our own. For Russia and the eastern European countries are busy doing what the English did under Elizabeth — cultivating nationalism as a means of getting things done in society. The identification of the individual's prestige with that of the national society he lives in is being sedulously inculcated as the great means by which the communist millennium is to be brought about. The rows that are developing about the un-Marxian sin of 'nationalism' in that area are a piquant confirmation of this. The resurgent nationalism of the South American states is of a very similar kind. All of them, and particularly Argentina, are doing their utmost to make of themselves the chauvinistic monstrosity which they say that Britain has always been. They want population, they want territory, they want industry, they want prestige — in sum, they all want to be world powers.

The true peculiarity of the twentieth century has now revealed itself: it is the foreshortening of history. Processes which used to take centuries now last only for decades. The creation of the English nation, its rise to power and its succession to world domination took fifteen hundred years; its decline has taken barely a generation. The emergence of the United States has taken something like a hundred and fifty years; the period of its dominance may be even shorter in proportion. Now that events have come to be crammed together in this way, it is possible that the Stalins and the Titos and the Perons may have their nationalist ambitions realized very swiftly — in part and for a time. But it is quite certain that men and women who support them will be brought very, very much more quickly up against the dilemma

which faces me as an Englishman in 1950. History seems to have conferred upon us in this country a peculiar, a melancholy uniqueness. We undoubtedly still stand as the symbols of world empire, of that untroubled enjoyment of marked superiority over all other peoples which nationalism holds out as the ultimate ambition of all its devotees. But we no longer enjoy such a pre-eminence in fact and we have watched it slip away from us at a time when the thing itself has become an anachronism.

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MARX AND RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONARIES

W. WEINTRAUB

THE Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow has published a volume of Marx's and Engels's correspondence with their Russian friends.¹ All the letters by Marx and Engels are already known. As for the letters of the Russians, about half of them — 46 to be exact — are published in this collection for the first time. Most of the others were hitherto scattered in specialist publications, not easily accessible; hence the importance of the volume. It brings together for the first time the material that enables us to have a clear picture of the scope and character of the personal relations of Marx and Engels with these Russians. Moreover, it shows us in historical perspective the peculiar features of Russian Marxism.

This does not mean, however, that it is an edition that will satisfy any of the serious requirements of historical editorship. The volume is provided with a foreword, but we look in vain in it for a single phrase explaining the principles of the editing and of the selection. For it is a selection. As concerns the letters by Marx and Engels, comparison with those printed in the complete edition of their works shows that the omissions in this volume are not numerous and are unimportant. But what about the letters of their Russian correspondents? Here we may surmise that the number of them that lie hidden in the archives of the Institute and are still unpublished is considerable. In the notes to Marx's correspondence with Danielson, the Russian translator of *Das Kapital*, the editors themselves refer to five of Danielson's letters that have not been published in this volume.² A German book, *Karl Marx, Chronik seines Lebens*, published by the same Institute in 1934, puts us on the track of a far greater number of still unpublished letters: the *Chronik*, a very valuable help for every serious student of Marx, gives us, sometimes day by day, the events of his life, and quotes all the available sources used to establish each one. There are there references to a number of letters that are not to be found in the volume. Enumeration of them all would be tedious. One instance should suffice. The *Chronik* quotes three letters to Marx written by Hartmann, a terrorist of the Narodnaya Volya ('People's Will').³ In this volume we find only the first.

¹ *Perepiska K. Marksа i F. Engel'sа s russkimi politicheskimi deyatelyami*, Moscow, Ogiz, 1947, pp. 307 and 1.

² ibid., pp. 56, 75, 77, 85, 113.

³ *Chronik*, p. 455, mentions three letters by Hartmann, dated March 21st, October 24th and October 28th, 1880.

One wishes one could be sure that those letters have been excluded because they are uninteresting and do not contain any relevant information. But one cannot dismiss a suspicion that some of them may have been omitted because they refer to matters which, judging by present Soviet standards, are tricky and embarrassing. We have instances of such topics in some of Marx's and Engels's letters. Thus, from one of Marx's letters, written in 1877, we learn that he was collecting through Lavrov, a well-known Russian revolutionary, information about the persecution of Uniates by the Tsarist regime. He needed it for an Irish M.P. who raised the whole question of these persecutions in the House of Commons. The matter must have been a delicate one for the Soviet editors since the Soviet regime has recently been doing precisely the same thing, only far more thoroughly than ever Tsarist Russia did. However, Marx's letter referring to the question was not suppressed by the editors. The official Soviet devotion to every word uttered by Marx would make such a suppression a very difficult thing. Besides, the letter has already been published. Thus the only thing the editors could do was to leave the whole matter without any explanation in the notes, although the name of the Irish M.P. for whom Marx was collecting the information is known (it was O'Clery), and it is not difficult to find in Hansard the texts of his speeches based on it.¹

However, as we have no access to the unpublished Russian letters, any speculation as to the reason for their suppression would be vain. We must be content with what we are given, the more so in that the material printed in the book is very interesting and raises a number of important questions.

Marx's correspondence with the Russians starts early, in the 'forties. But his first Russian correspondents, Annenkov and Sazonov, were rather casual and by no means typical. Annenkov was a tourist interested in Western celebrities and in new Western theories; Sazonov was a muddle-headed radical emigré, and easy enthusiast lacking both the determination and the discernment necessary for political action. For a time both felt enthusiastic about Marx and his theory. That enthusiasm did not, however, entail any real understanding of Marx's teaching and had for them no consequences. For a short time Marx took Annenkov's effusions for something far more serious than they really were, and admitted him to his confidence. On account of this he was afterwards the more bitter in his comments on Annenkov; but in the meanwhile, in 1846, when Annenkov wrote to him that he could not make up his mind about Proudhon, Marx rushed to his help with a long letter sharply criticizing Proudhon. The editors of the volume reprinted from Marx's

¹ *Hansard. Parliamentary Debates*, vol. CCXXXII, col. 1760; vol. CCXXXIV, col. 257, coll. 903-7.

correspondence with Annenkov only that letter, which is of primary importance for every student of Marxism, and two of Annenkov's letters directly connected with it. They left out the rest of that correspondence, as well as the bulk of Marx's correspondence with Sazonov, except for Sazonov's last letter, written in 1860, which Marx himself reprinted in the appendix to his polemical book *Herr Vogt* and which contains some interesting — although still unconfirmed — information about Marx's influence in Russia at that time.

The other Russian correspondents who came later (from 1868 onwards) were men and women of quite a different type. With the exception of Maxim Kovalevsky, a well-known scholar, they were all Marxists. They were of different political shades, sometimes bitterly fighting one another and contesting each other's right to the title of 'true Marxist', but they all deeply believed in Marx, and saw in him their revered guide and teacher. For Marx, who for years hated and despised Russia, seeing in it only a backward country and a bulwark of despotism, these enthusiastic followers from the East were something quite unexpected. None the less, they were eagerly accepted. There was in Marx something of a prophet, and as became a prophet he passionately longed for disciples. Now Russia was providing him with those devoted, blind, fanatical disciples, he sought for in vain in the West.

The impact of these disciples on Marx himself was great. In his fifties he starts learning Russian. Soon we see him buried in Russian statistical material, studies on Russian history and Russian social conditions, discovering for himself Russian writers like Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov, the Russian books being provided by devoted followers from St Petersburg. Formerly he saw in Russia only the greatest obstacle to the world revolution; now he started to see in it one of the hopes of that revolution.

The correspondence starts in 1868, just after Marx had published the first volume of *Das Kapital*, and centres firstly round the problem of translating the book and publishing it in Russia. When the first proposal reached him from Russia he was greatly surprised and amused. He wrote then to his German friend, Kugelmann, that he considered it to be the effect of a kind of intellectual voracity ('reine Gourmandise') of the Russian aristocracy.¹ Soon, however, he learned to take his Russian followers seriously. At the beginning the book was to have been translated by a revolutionary named Lopatin, Marx's personal friend. But Lopatin was arrested soon after his return to Russia, and the work was done by a St Petersburg economist, Danielson. There were fears that the Tsarist censorship would not pass the book. The censor, however, acted with the

¹ KARL MARX, *Letters to dr. Kugelmann*, London, 1934, p. 77 (letter dated October 12th, 1868).

frivolity so often met with in the history of censorship. He did not think that a book of such forbidding scholarship could be in any way politically dangerous, but he prohibited the reproduction in it of a portrait of Marx. However, the translation sold heavily, better even than the German original. From the beginning Marxism took firm roots in Russian soil and Marx found eager readers among Russian political emigrés as well as in Russia proper.

From that time on, the correspondence with the Russians, both in Russia and abroad, goes on up to Marx's death in 1883, and is afterwards taken over by Engels. Letters sent to Russia are couched in cautious terms: Marx signs himself Williams, political activity is referred to as 'business', the arrested Lopatin as 'our mutual friend'. There are, however, no signs of interference by the postal censorship. The real danger came from another quarter. Very soon the divisions among Russian revolutionaries began to be embarrassing for Marx and Engels.

The first Russian followers of Marx were a rather queer group. They were agrarian revolutionaries, the so called Narodniks ('Populists'). Marx with his eyes and hopes fixed on industrialized Western societies neglected the agrarian problem in his teaching. He did not believe that independent peasants would be able to survive in the conditions of the capitalistic society. In the same way, he thought, as big industrial concerns would eventually oust smaller manufacturers, big landowners must reduce all the peasants to the status of an agricultural proletarian. And he saw the solution of the problem in the future socialist state in an agricultural army of workers parallel to that of town workers. However, the whole agrarian problem had, in his eyes, only secondary importance. The new social forms, he thought, must be worked out in towns; the revolution would be brought about by the industrial workers.

Russia in the 'sixties was lagging far behind the West in industrial development, and its working class at that time was very weak. The Narodniks, however, were convinced that, unlike the West, Russia would be able to perform its Socialist revolution through the peasants. The ground for such a belief they saw in the peculiarly Russian institution of the agrarian commune, 'mir'. Romantic theorists represented 'mir' as a genuine Russian social institution, that had survived from archaic times, and gave it a new emotional value. Unfortunately, after the great land reform of 1861 the agricultural communes were decaying. This did not, however, deter the Narodniks. They believed that through their revolutionary action they would be able to graft Socialism on to the communes, and thus the Russian social revolution would jump the whole stage of capitalist development and pass from the primitive agrarian commune straight to Socialism.

Marxist theory believed in revolution achieved through the mass action of an organized and class-conscious proletariat. For agrarian Socialists, like the Narodniks, the revolutionary tactics had to be completely different. They believed that they would be able to carry through the revolution by means of individual terrorism.

Before long they had to face in Russia a new trend of Marxism, this time an orthodox one. The orthodox Marxists derided both the aims and tactics of the Narodniks as romantic, chimerical and dangerous. They saw the future of Russia in an accelerated process of industrialization that would produce a vast industrial proletariat, the army of the revolution to come.

The feud between these two sections of Russian Marxists set Marx himself a grave problem. Personal ties of affection bound him to the Narodniks who provided him with his first and most devoted Russian followers. On the other hand, he could not overlook the crudeness and naïvety of their teaching. Moreover, the orthodox Marxists used to combat the Narodnik doctrine with quotations from the book that had already become the bible of the Russian revolutionaries, *Das Kapital*.

In this rather embarrassing situation Marx pursued evasive tactics and did not allow himself to be drawn into these Russian polemics. When asked to take part he would refuse, arguing that his knowledge of Russian social conditions was not adequate. It is more significant that on the only occasion that he decided to take sides in public, in a letter to a Russian paper, he did so in favour of the Narodniks.

His task in *Das Kapital* — he stated in this letter — was to describe a specific Western historical process of social change. He did not intend to compose a blueprint for social development of universal validity. One should not apply quotations from *Das Kapital* to Russian conditions. Russian social development was conditioned by circumstances peculiar to Russia, and the course of Russian development might well be different from that in the West.

A closer perusal of this statement by Marx shows that he did not commit himself to supporting the Narodnik doctrine. His protest had an exclusively negative application. It was directed solely against the use of *Das Kapital* and his name in polemics against the Narodniks.

Thus his attitude towards the dispute was determined rather by emotional than strictly doctrinal motives. One can see in it also a residuum of Marx's former anti-Russian prejudices. The bare fact — he seems to say — that in such a backward and despotic country as Russia there was a body of Marxist revolutionaries was so unexpected and so splendid, that it would be priggish to burden them with refinements of doctrine.

He defended them the more willingly because he was highly impressed by those Narodnik revolutionaries he met in London. In a letter to Jenny, his daughter, he wrote with enthusiasm about their toughness, self-sacrifice and their lack of any high-sounding phraseology. He would even shut his eyes to their terrorist activities. With a touch of matter-of-fact cynicism so characteristic of his way of tackling problems of political expediency, he would assume that to be shocked at acts of terrorism would be as foolish as to be shocked by an earthquake in Chios.¹

Nowhere are the paradoxes and intricacies of Marx's attitude to Russian revolutionaries better seen than in his correspondence with Vera Zasulich, a well-known Russian woman revolutionary. At the beginning of 1881 Zasulich wrote to him from Geneva an impetuous and naïve letter. The letter showed Zasulich's blind faith firstly in the possibility of building in Russia a socialism based on agrarian communities; secondly, in Marx. Unfortunately, there were people who tried to play off the one faith against the other. That is why she decided to appeal to him and ask him for a final reply. The letter left no room for any doubt about the kind of reply she would expect from Marx.

Marx was in a dilemma. He started writing a long dissertation that would satisfy his Russian follower and at the same time would not conceal his reservatio mentalis. However, something went wrong with it. So he started it again in a different way. But he was as little satisfied with his second draft as with the first. He started a third time . . . After his death four different drafts of his reply were found among his papers. The letter that finally reached Vera Zasulich — it was the fifth draft — was short and dogmatic. Marx did not disclose in it any of his reservations, and after having protested once more that one cannot apply to Russia the analysis he had made in *Das Kapital*, he confirmed her in her faith that 'the agrarian commune may become the basis of Russia's social regeneration', provided it were possible to secure conditions for its normal development.

These drafts make extremely interesting reading. Unfortunately, they are not to be found in the present volume. Its editors published only the letter in its final shape and did not even mention the drafts in their notes. The Russians themselves published those drafts a quarter of a century ago, in a special publication called *Marx-Engels Archives*.² Since that time, however, such a Byzantine halo has

¹ Letter dated April 11th, 1881, published by B. Nikolayevsky in the monthly *Die Gesellschaft*, 1924, pp. 359ff.

² Published first in Russian translation in *Arkhiv K. Marks i F. Engel'sa*, vol. I, Moscow, 1924, pp. 270-86; and two years later in French originals in *Marx-Engels Archive*, vol. I, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1926, pp. 318-40.

gathered in Russia round the sacred head, that Marx at a loss for an appropriate formula, Marx wavering, Marx compromising with his convictions, would be shocking for the Russian audience of today.

The drafts are the more interesting because they throw light on a problem sometimes rather naïvely raised by Western Marxists, the problem of the so called 'betrayal' of Marxism by the Bolsheviks. They show us that Marx himself was 'betraying' Marxism when he applied his teaching to Russian conditions.

Engels afterwards followed the same tactics as Marx. When a well-known orthodox Marxist, Plechanov, published his famous pamphlet, *Our Dissensions*, Engels was indignant. We know from a letter of Kautsky to Bernstein that he agreed with its arguments but considered its publication to be a tactical error.¹ And in one of the letters published in this volume he exhorted Plechanov with words that today have a specially ironical ring: 'Moreover, let us not demand any rigid orthodoxy.' He argued that, in the West at least, a dissenter or two could not make great trouble.

There are surprisingly few discordant notes in this correspondence. The masters are beaming with benevolence, helpful, appreciative, condescending; the pupils full of reverence and gratitude. Of course, one cannot exclude the possibility that one or more letters from among those not yet published may introduce a jarring tone, spoiling this harmony. But such letters, if they exist at all, cannot change the general picture. Of course, there was Bakunin and his embittered fight with Marx. But the real political influence of Bakunin was in Latin countries, not in Russia. There was also Tkachev and his violent polemics with Engels. But that was only an episode without any serious significance. The volume shows us how great was the impact of Marxism on the Russian revolutionary movement from the beginning. Some people considered it to be a strange freak of history that it should be in Russia that a communist Revolution should succeed. The book reminds us that already in 1917 that 'freak' had the backing of half a century of tradition.

¹ Letter dated June 30th, 1885, published in *Die Briefe von Friedrich Engels an Eduard Bernstein mit Briefen von Karl Kautsky an Ebendenselben*, Berlin, 1925 p. 172.

BOOKS RECEIVED

J. P. T. BURY: France 1814-1940. *Methuen*, 18s. net.

It is probable that in no country (except possibly the United States) has so much learning and technical acuteness been devoted to modern national history as in France. It is, therefore, especially bold for a foreigner to tackle a French theme, and perhaps only those who have risked themselves on that stormy sea can fully appreciate Mr Bury's combination of learning and sober judgment. Equally notable is his excellent sense of proportion and his appreciation of the shift of perspective that now makes us more just to those once totally discredited régimes, the Restoration and the Second Empire. Here we have a deeply scholarly and admirably clear narrative of one of the great themes of modern history.

Mr Bury is not ashamed to be an old fashioned political historian (though he has interwoven economic history most ingeniously and, for a book of this kind, adequately). His main theme is the failure to integrate the French community; the breakdown of the various attempts to provide a substitute for the old unity round the monarch. The first failure was the Restoration itself (though its chances were ruined by the most frivolous and criminal adventure in French history, the Hundred Days). But all the régimes that have followed have failed (some have not attempted) to unify the nation in its political aspects. It is the same story from Louis XVIII to Charles de Gaulle. And (a limitation imposed by the chronological scheme), Mr Bury cannot, I think, fully explain that failure because he does not consider in detail the situation created by the Revolution. Without taking as seriously as Mr Bury the class-war theories of M. Guérin, they do cast a light on the cleavage in French society that has lasted at any rate from the flight to Varennes to this day. Rightly, Mr Bury does not much indulge in 'might-have-beens' but he is justified in speculating on the possible survival of the Second Empire, its evolution into a real constitutional monarchy, far more firmly and more widely based than Louis Philippe's. Such a speculation is legitimate because much of the politics of the Third Republic, in its formative years, can only be understood if the strength of the Second Empire is allowed for, and the consequent necessity of creating a legend of Republican legitimacy, so that 'la République' could be deemed to have a continued existence from 1848 if not from 1792. (A speculation of my own, which would have been illegitimate, is whether the Prince Imperial, with the education he received from his misguided mother, would have differed much from the Comte de Chambord.)

Mr Bury insinuates, rather than states dogmatically, the effect on French politics of the comparatively retarded development of industrialism in France and the continuance of peasant habits of mind. France could continue to afford 'mere' politics long after the more industrial states were involved in the problems of 'social justice'. Among many merits of this book is a very high standard of accuracy. But though the Villele scheme did not cost a milliard, it cost more than 650,000 francs. (p. 35). The Broglie did not emigrate (p. 12) and Brillat-Savarin had not to wait till the Restoration for the revival of cookery. Thermidor was enough, and the two Cambacérès, the Consul and the Cardinal, were as good trenchermen as any returned émigré. The chassepot was not a quick-firing rifle (no rifle was before the new American carbine); it was a breach-loader, much superior to the Prussian needle-gun (p. 111). Does 'monks' on page 161 include brothers of teaching congregations? And the figures for 'congregations' given on page 199 seem oddly extravagant when compared with those on page 201. Briand is described as a 'militarist' when presumably 'militant' is meant (p. 202), and Seignobos's pessimistic view of the results of the Poincaré stabilization is only just if confined to fixed-interest securities (p. 269). But these are trifles.

The only serious complaint that can be made (and Mr Bury is entitled to reply that his plan does not call for it) is the comparative absence of institutional history. We hear of the Conseil d'Etat but not of what it was. The changes in local government are merely glanced at and the educational system and, still more serious, the Church, are never synthetically described. Lastly, the only chapter where the reader is in danger of being misled is that on the Dreyfus case. Esterhazy, for instance, was not a gunner, an important point made by the anti-revisionists who said that only a gunner could have written the *bordereau*. And I cannot see what 'the Affair' had to do with *habeas corpus*. Dreyfus was tried by a court-martial as was Baillie-Stewart. There were changes in military law as a result of the trials, and none of the laymen involved gained or lost by defects in the French equivalents of *habeas corpus* (which do, *pace* Mr Bury, exist). The real weakness of French criminal procedure is its interminable length, but it is no worse than American which has *habeas corpus* and all the other Anglo-Saxon guarantees of 'due process of law'. Before we get too complacent over our virtues, we might remember that there were no courts of Criminal Appeal here until the twentieth century and they were only established in England and Scotland after great judicial scandals.

D. W. BROGAN

FRANCIS WILLIAMS: *Fifty Years March, the Rise of the Labour Party*. Odhams Press, 7s. 6d. net.

MARGARET COLE (Ed.): *The Webbs and Their Work*. Muller, 15s. net.

As the fiftieth anniversary of the Labour Party approached one trembled to think what dull and heavy souvenir Transport House would produce after the pattern of that three-volume monstrosity, *The Book of the Labour Party*. *Fifty Years March*, in spite of its garish title and cover, is a welcome surprise, not merely because it is well-produced and inexpensive, but also because it is ably written. Francis Williams's work is easy to read without being puerile, and his gift of vivid journalism is well exercised at least in the early part of the volume. It was too much to hope for any original research by the author, but he has found plenty of scope in filling out Professor Cole's sketches of Labour history into a more colourful picture. There are not many inaccuracies, and Mr Williams's construction of the personalities of the early Labour leaders in their strength and weakness is work well done. Almost for the first time since 1931 Ramsay MacDonald gets a fair deal in a labour history. In dealing with more recent years, however, the narrative becomes thin and anaemic: it would be too much to expect the party's official biographer to attempt any real judgment of its present leadership.

Fifty Years March is propaganda, albeit good propaganda. *The Webbs and Their Work* has no axe to grind. As Mrs Cole points out in her introduction, nothing is to be gained by attempting a 'justification' of the Webbs' place in British political history, when that place is already an established one. Instead, this volume of critical essays is simply designed to throw further light upon their remarkable career in all its many departments, principally from the evidence of those who worked with them, but in some cases, where fellow-workers no longer survive, from the investigations of research students.

Mrs Cole as editor has got the best out of her contributors. By means of a questionnaire she has even elicited an extra anecdote or two from G. B. S.; and a variety of authorities deal competently with the aspects of Webb work and personality with which they came into contact. They seem to differ considerably in their assessment of the Webbs' personal qualities. We must no doubt wait for the further volumes of Mrs Webb's diaries and for the publication of their personal correspondence, in order to obtain more definite indications. About

Sidney's character, we may already know all there is to know. As he himself wrote in articles of reminiscence in Dick Sheppard's *St Martin's Review* (articles which Mrs Cole might well have had reprinted in this volume):

I have very little knowledge of what has happened to me internally. I am, I suppose, what is nowadays called an extrovert. Things impinge on me, and I react to the impact, occasionally, with ideas and suggestions that prove interesting.

A man who could claim, as Sidney did, to have been influenced in his childhood more by *Kelly's London Directory* than by any other work might well be considered the despair of the student interested in personality.

However, the most important aspects of the volume under review are to be found in those essays in which some assessment is attempted of the contribution to political thought and action made by the Fabian Socialists whom the Webbs inspired and led. The essayists who discuss these questions are R. C. K. Ensor, Leonard Woolf and two research students, Alan McBriar and Joan Clarke: and these four essays are in many ways the most valuable in the book.

Mr McBriar points out that it is easy to be misled by the term 'Municipal Socialism' and to assume that Sidney Webb pioneered on the L.C.C. all sorts of municipal enterprises which the Socialists were the first to conceive of and the L.C.C. the first to put into practice. This, he argues, is not the case: in fact, Webb and his colleagues of the Progressive Party, which was a Liberal-Labour alliance, were simply bringing London up to the standard of such cities as Birmingham in the most expeditious fashion. Webb deserves great credit as an efficient administrator and as a committee man capable of getting things done, and also as a propagandist at election time to ensure the re-election of his party. But there was nothing new in his *London Programme*, and nothing distinctively socialist. This aspect of his work does not link up with the development of socialism in the national sphere. The very existence of an alliance between Liberal and Labour forces in London was a grave disadvantage to the development of a Labour Party independent of both Liberals and Conservatives. Indeed, for twenty years the main direction of the Webbs' work was at cross-purposes with that of Keir Hardie and the I.L.P. This was why, as Ensor points out in his essay, not all the Fabians approved of the policy of permeation. Hubert Bland, for instance, was opposed to it not only because he disliked Liberalism but also because, from his work for the Manchester *Sunday Chronicle*, he knew that the working men of the north of England disliked it.

The explanation of the Fabians' differences with the Labour movement at large — differences which are well illustrated in the first volume of *Our Partnership* — lies in a whole complex of factors, of which their middle-class connections form only one. The problem is also bound up with the differences in political climate between London and the provinces, due to divergent social and economic conditions. It was in part also a matter of the conflict of personalities: the Webbs and the MacDonalds, for instance, could never work together, and it was only during the 1914-18 War, when MacDonald had lost to Henderson his key position inside the Labour Party, that Sidney was able to play an active part in shaping the party's organization and programme.

Leonard Woolf deals with the political thought of the Webbs, and illustrates some of their limitations, notably their concentration on social institutions and consequent lack of interest, for instance, in problems of international relations, where no real institutions existed. The discussion is an interesting one, but Mr Woolf ignores one important influence on their thought, namely Mr Shaw, who will be found to be as brilliant an originator of Fabian ideas as an exponent of them. In the South African War the Webbs, who were ignorant of foreign policy, were misled by Shaw's appeal for efficient imperialism, which was based on the

view of morality which he expounds in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*: 'Actions are to be judged by their effect on happiness, and not by their conformity to any ideal.' This is a dangerous attitude to adopt, if only because it is very much easier to have an ideal and be loyal to it than to have no ideal and to be clever enough to see the consequences of every action. The Fabians, clever as they were, were not able to foresee the consequences of their failure to oppose the South African War. They alienated just the very man with whom they could have worked most fruitfully in the early years of the century — Lloyd George. Their politics were clever, it is true: but too often, as Ensor says, 'for all their cleverness they went entirely astray'.

The paradox of the Webbs was that, fundamentally, they did not understand politics. They could not appreciate the popular psychology or estimate the appeal of the great men who, as we can see in retrospect, dominate the history of British politics in the last half-century — Keir Hardie, Lloyd George, Winston Churchill. They knew how institutions worked, and within certain limits they could work them; but they could not measure the forces that transmuted and transcended these institutions — the elemental forces of political power. 'Marriage', said Beatrice, 'is the wastepaper basket of the emotions.' She did not realize that the same could be said of politics or indeed of almost every field of human endeavour. And so in a real political upheaval they were lost. They were lost and enchanted in the Soviet Union, just as they were lost and bewildered during the First World War. In the war, Beatrice was frightened as well as bewildered, for unlike Sidney she was interested in moral problems and always distrusted Shaw for his attitude to them. One may surmise that on this occasion she secretly revolted against the Fabians: this alone can account for her action in joining the I.L.P., the body she had helped to denounce so many years before;



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for she joined it now at the moment of its greatest unpopularity. As for Sidney, he once had parliamentary ambitions, and actually had his eyes on the seat George Howell was to vacate in 1892; but all this was forgotten in his work for the L.C.C. It was just as well, as his subsequent record as a Minister showed. The 'Partnership', no one will deny, was a unique enterprise: but there were limits to its scope.

H. M. PELLING

FAITH THOMPSON: *Magna Carta: its Role in the Making of the English Constitution, 1300-1629.* Minnesota University Press: Oxford University Press, 36s. net.

In 1925 Miss Thompson published a history of *The First Century of Magna Carta*. In this substantial volume she has continued that history for another three centuries — from the morrow of Edward I's confirmation of the charters down to Coke's *Second Institute* and to that sermon preached by Mr Salisbury in May 1629 lamenting 'to see the famous laws and ancient charters of this kingdom to lie in contempt'. Laud had notes taken of this sermon and sent them to the Chief Justice for advice on proceedings: Mr Salisbury might have need of *Magna Carta*.

Miss Thompson's treatment of charter history falls into three main parts. First, she demonstrates the importance of the charter in the later Middle Ages in the domain of private law, even while it still retained some pre-eminence as a 'liberty document' (it was in the fourteenth century that c. 39 was misinterpreted in a way which made it useful to seventeenth-century parliamentarians). Secondly, under the Tudors the charter played a smaller part in politics and law; but it was publicized by the printers of statutes and chronicles, subjected to the commentaries of lawyers and scholars and, before Elizabeth was dead, discovered by the Puritans. Finally, it was at the centre of the constitutional conflicts of Stuart times, particularly as interpreted and misinterpreted by Sir Edward Coke, 'scattering or sowing his own conceits — by taking occasion (though not offered) to range and expatiate upon bye-matters'.

In this last respect, Miss Thompson may not altogether have escaped the influence of that great lawyer. Her history of *Magna Carta* leads to excursions, not only into the history of the constitution, but also of the printing trade. There is detail of legal cases and parliamentary debates, about the furnishing of Middle Temple hall and the efforts of James I to convert the heretical Bartholomew Legate. At the very least we can say that a history of *Magna Carta* for these centuries and on this scale will not again be necessary; and that Miss Thompson's treatise will be a quarry for many others than searchers after charter history. For the latter, however, and the historians of English liberties there, will be a particular delight in reading what a Puritan lawyer could make of *Magna Carta*:

How can it be said (asked Fuller at the beginning of the seventeenth century) that freemen according to the statute of *Magna Carta* use libertatibus et liberis consuetudinibus suis, when Mr Darcy hath a patent to restrain cards, another to restrain tennis play, another hawking and hunting, etc. Is not this to make freemen bondmen? If the Queen cannot to maintain her war take from her subject 12d. but by Parliament, how much less may she take moderate recreation from all subjects . . . For commonweals are not made for kings, but kings for commonweals.

So was the reputation of *Magna Carta* made; and Miss Thompson is the indefatigable historian of the Charter's reputation. Her book is one for times of leisure; but for such times even her footnotes (ample as they are) are not without their instructive or their lighter moments.

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LONGMANS

W. O. LESTER SMITH: *Education in Great Britain*. *Home University Library*, Oxford University Press, 5s. net.

Dr I. A. Richards in his well-known work on Literary Criticism warns the critic or reviewer to beware of stock responses and not to describe the poems of Milton as good simply because they are by Milton. Instinct would certainly prompt one to praise an educational work by Mr Lester Smith merely on the grounds of his high office in the administrative world; but I hope that readers will believe me when I say that *Education in Great Britain* is an excellent little book objectively, and would be equally excellent whoever had been its author. It is pleasantly written, yet at the same time erudite. Its numerous quotations both in prose and verse, ranging from Plato to Bertrand Russell, bear witness to the immense learning which lies behind it. In method it is varied. Chapter 1 is predominantly philosophical and deals with the moral and spiritual values which have prevailed in the past and are likely to prevail in the future. Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 are largely historical, tracing the growth of our heterogeneous array of schools, our religious difficulties, our problems of curriculum and our attempt to achieve a proper balance of power between the individual and the state. Chapters 6 and 7 survey the present system with its involved administrative complexities, especially in relation to the Act of 1944.

Mr Lester Smith attaches great importance to toleration and this is reflected in the high degree of impartiality which is displayed throughout the book. Personal predilections are always kept in the background. Like nearly all works by educational administrators and philosophers, it tends perhaps to be abstract and idealistic rather than severely practical, stressing — for example — the cult of social individuality and the blessings of community life whilst hardly mentioning the deplorable professional status of the teacher, the serious decline in standards of literacy, and the heavy increase in out-of-school duties which is fast converting men of learning into social welfare officers. Speaking as a schoolmaster with inside experience of five grammar schools, I should also say that he greatly exaggerates the measure of liberty which teachers enjoy and the amount of notice which is taken of their opinions. He comes much nearer to the truth on p. 150 when he says that 'the gap between theory and practice in education that has existed through the centuries was never so wide as it is today'. On p. 135 the figure 2.46 is surely a misprint for 24.6.

The book has both a bibliography and an index, and it should be welcome not only to the teacher and the diploma student, but also to the town councillor, the historian and the educated layman. It does not go beyond Great Britain and it does not discuss matters such as juvenile delinquency, which fall outside the scope of the Ministry of Education.

J. R. WATMOUTH

BOOKS RECEIVED

The inclusion of any book in this list does not preclude its review in a later issue

LYDIA AVILOV: Chekhov in My Life, A Love Story, Translated with an Introduction by David Magarshack. Lehmann, 10s. 6d. net.

BRITISH Journal of Sociology, Volume I, No. 1, March 1950. Routledge, 10s. net.

JOHN BUTT: The Augustan Age. Hutchinson's University Library, 7s. 6d. net.

RENÉ ALBRECHT-CARRIÉ: Italy from Napoleon to Mussolini. Columbia University Press: Oxford University Press, 34s. net.

F. M. CORNFORD: The Unwritten Philosophy and other Essays, edited with an Introduction by W. K. C. Guthrie. Cambridge University Press, 12s. 6d. net.

L. F. CRISP: The Parliamentary Government of the Commonwealth of Australia. Longmans, 21s. net.



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CHRISTOPHER DAWSON: Religion and the Rise of Western Culture, the Gifford Lectures, Delivered in the University of Edinburgh 1948-1949. *Sheed & Ward*, 15s. net.

E. J. DINGWALL: Very Peculiar People, Portrait Studies in the Queer, the Abnormal and the Uncanny. *Rider & Co.*, 18s. net.

GEORGE IAN DUTHIE: Elizabethan Shorthand and the First Quarto of KING LEAR. *Blackwell*, 10s. 6d. net.

KEITH FEILING: A History of England, From the Coming of the English to 1918. *Macmillan*, 30s. net.

THOMAS GILBY: Phoenix and Turtle, The Unity of Knowing and Being. *Longmans*, 16s. net.

OSCAR HALECKI: The Limits and Divisions of European History. *Sheed & Ward*, 10s. 6d. net.

F. H. HINSLY: Command of the Sea, The Naval Side of British History from 1918 to the end of the Second World War, with a Foreword by Admiral of the Fleet The Lord Fraser of North Cape. *Christophers*, 7s. 6d. net.

E. R. HUGHES & K. HUGHES: Religion in China. *Hutchinson's University Library*, 7s. 6d. net.

BERNARD JAFFÉ: Crucibles, the Story of Chemistry from Ancient Alchemy to Nuclear Fission. *Hutchinson's Scientific and Technical Publications*, 18s. net.

M. L. JACKS: Modern Trends in Education. *Melrose*, 15s. net.

E. O. JAMES: The Concept of Deity, a comparative and historical study. *Hutchinson's University Library (Senior Series)*, 18s. net.

ARTHUR KEITH: An Autobiography. *Watts*, 25s. net.

SHERMAN KENT: Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy. *Princeton University Press*: *Oxford University Press*, 24s. net.

CHRISTOPHER LLOYD (Ed.): The Voyages of Captain James Cook Round the World, Selected from his Journals. *Cresset Press*, 9s. 6d. net.

J. W. MACKAIL: The Life of William Morris, with an Introduction by Sir Sydney Cockerell. *Oxford University Press (Worlds Classics)*, 7s. net.

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